Awakin

Supportive, Inspiring Short Readings

from AWAKIN, a ServiceSpace offerring

Awakin

Supportive, Inspiring Short Readings

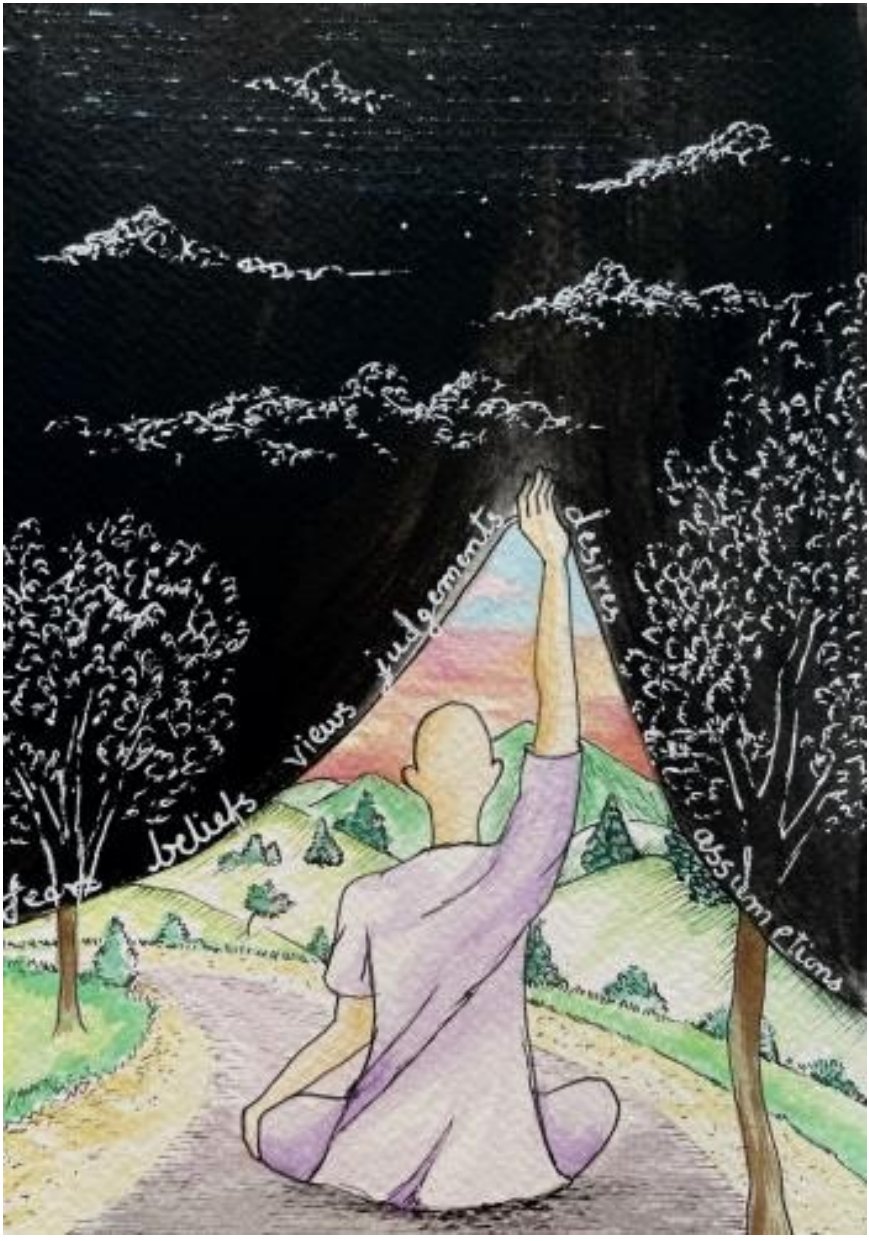
from awakin.org
a ServiceSpace offering

All images © 2023 by image producer
All readings © 2023 by reading author
All additional text© 2023 by ServiceSpace

ServiceSpace.org

Dedicated to

all the writers, artists,
and other volunteers
who joyfully gave
their time and talents
to make this possible.


fear
beliefs
views
judgements
desires
assumptions

Introduction

Awakin and ServiceSpace

Awakin is about
deepening our self-awareness.
By changing ourselves, we change the world.

Awakin is a curated repository of secular wisdom that offers people a chance to explore their own life and experiences more deeply via insightful readings It is an invitation for people to shake off habitual preoccupations and access a more reflective space within.

ServiceSpace is an organization run entirely by volunteers. We leverage technology to encourage everyday people around the world to do small acts of service. Our aim is to ignite the fundamental generosity in ourselves and others, creating both inner and outer transformation.

Additional information is available
at ServiceSpace.org

Contents

Geneen Marie Haugen *An Ode To Imagination*……..1

Tash Shadman *En-Lightening*……..4

Chuang Tzu *The Empty Boat*……6

Colin Walsh *A Flame In A Dark Cave*……9

Unknown *When Winnie The Pooh Was Scared* 11

Lorenz Sell *Humility*……..13

April Rinne *Coddiwomple*……16

Laurence Freeman *New Forms Of Religion*……..18

Brother David Steindl-Rast
Gratefulness Happens Before Thinking……21

Ella Cara Deloria *There Are Many Voices Besides Ours.*23

Mark Nepo *The Practice Before The Practice*……25

Rick Rubin *The Vessel And The Filter*……29

Emannuel *What You Are Is Perfect Imperfection*……31

Joan Tollifson *Compulsion To Closure*……33

Thomas Moore *Tale Of The Ringless Ring*……36

Bonnie Rose *Shadow Cannot Drive Out Shame*……*38*

Rabbi Yael Levy *Praying With The News*……41

Howard Thurman *Sound Of The Genuine*……43

Nikole Lim *Pain Expands Our Capacity For Joy*……45

Christina Feldman *Beginner's Mind Vs. Expert Mind*…. 47

Rev. Joan Halifax *Radical Optimism*……..50

Wayne Dyer *Forgiveness*……..52

Peter Russell *The Simplest Meditation: Waiting*…….54

Neale Donald Walsch *Irony Of Marriage*……..57

Deborah Hawkins *Letting Someone Know They're Not Alone Is No Small Thing*……..*60*

Kent Nerburn *Shape Of Silence*……..*63*

Dougald Hine *End Of The World*……..64

Charlotte Joko Beck *Our Practice Is To Close The Gap*..67

Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee *The Extraordinary In The Ordinary*……..71

Joanna Macy *Being Acted Through*……..74

Ella Wheeler Wilcox *Don't Waste A Curse On The Universe*……..76

Roger S. Keyes *You Gotta Wobble Before You Stand*.....79

Thich Nhat Hanh *Interbeing*……81

Gayle Boss *A Turtle's Silver Bead Of Quietude*……83

Nicw Aske *The Grand Predicament*……..*85*

Pierre Pradervand *Integrity Is A Quality Of Being*……87

Sharon Salzberg *I Have What You Need*……89

Drew Lanham *Presence Of Things Beyond Flesh*……91

Donna Cameron *Being Nice Isn't The Same As Being Kind*……..94

James O'dea *The Cauldron Of Time*……..97

Jon Bernie *Reclaim Your Chicken*……99

Wakanyi Hoffman *Welcoming The Stranger*……..102
James Parker *An Ode To Low Expectations*……..105
J. Krishnamurti *What Exactly Is Love?*……..108
David Griswold *Look Around In Wonder*……*110*
Gangaji *Be Vigilance*……113
Danusha Laméris *Small Kindnesses*……115
Ayisha Siddiqa *Gamble On Humanity*……116
Gal Beckerman *How Much Silence Is Too Much?*……*118*
Brian Doyle *How We Wrestle Is Who We Are* . 121
Isira *Appearance As A Gift*……123
Carrie Newcomer *Good Bones, Pushing Water*……125
Simon Senek *Two Stonemasons*……127
Margaret Wheatley *Hopium*……129
Navin Amarasuriya *Meeting Our Own Mortality*……131
Srikumar Rao *A Flower's Job Is To Bloom*……134
Amishi P. Jha *Paying Attention*……136
Dalai Lama *Mental Immunity*……139
Indigo Ocean *Why I Stopped Fighting*……141
Judith Blackstone *Reality Of Actual Contact With Oneself*..143
Justin Faerman *On Love*……145
Swami Vivekananda *Slavery To The Senses*……149
David Haskell *Wonder Increases As Speed Decreases*...151
Kevin Kelly *Lessons On My 70th Birthday*……154
Courtney Martin *Fishing Before You Know How To Fish*...157

Shannon Lee *The Opponent Relationship Is Not A Contest*....159

Reb Zalman *Faith Is Different Than Beliefs*…….....161

Natureza Gabriel Kram *Three States Of Water.*…….163

Ramana Maharshi *Error Of Perception*…….....165

James Carse *Garden Teaches Us To Travel*……...168

Zenju Earthlyn Manuel *Sweeping My Heart*……121

Thomas Metzinger
The Self Is Not A Thing, But A Process……..173

Rob Burbea *Pay Attention To A Sense Of Space*……...175

Kerri Lake *Turning Survival Inside Out*……...179

Anushka Fernandopulle *Three Levels Of Happiness*....181

Thomas Berry *Opening To Greater Life*……...185

Elizabeth Gilbert *Agent Of Illumination*……...187

Ramakrishna Paramhansa *The Salt Doll*……...191

Meg Wheatley *Groundlessness*…….192

Parker Palmer *Two Types Of Heartbreaks*……...194

Paul Kalanithi
When Science Is The Arbiter Of Metaphysics……197

Pema Chodron *You Can't Get There From Here*……...201

Chelan Harkin *Say Wow*……..203

boredom
wonder wonder wonder wonder

An Ode To Imagination

Geneen Marie Haugen

What is unique about human beings? That was the question that followed me. Other philosophers have supposed that our form of consciousness is unique among the animals, or our symbol-making ability. But I want to propose something else that may be unique to our species, and that is our ability to imagine what does not yet exist, and then to create it. As far as we know, no other species has this capacity, with which we have made violins, iPhones, Hubble telescope, nuclear weapons, space travel. I mean, we know that beavers, who must keep trimming their ever growing teeth, gnaw down trees to build dams – but they don't seem to be building dams intended to light up Las Vegas. I want to propose that everything human beings have intentionally made, every modification to our "natural habitat", was born first in imagination. For better and worse. The human

imagination may be our greatest unacknowledged and underutilized innate capacity.

But in our era of ever-present media, our innate capacities for imagination may be suppressed by the constant bombardment of ready-made images from advertising, entertainment, news media, and political points of view. We are living amidst the greatest colonization of imagination ever known. In her poem “Rant,” Diane di Prima recognizes the catastrophic consequences of a battle for control of the human imagination: "the war that matters is the war against the imagination / all other wars are subsumed in it. / the ultimate famine is the starvation / of the imagination."

Our human capacities for imagination can still be cultivated, though, even now, when imaginative acts may be essential for the well-being of the Earth community.

For today, I want to connect the human capacity for imagination with the capacity for perception of an animate world. All of our ancestors, presumably, lived in a world brimming with participants, a world of companions, where birds might be regarded as messengers, where stone could be imbued with indwelling spirits, where snakes sometimes spoke or offered guidance. All of our ancestors, presumably, inhabited an animate world – some of our ancestors might still engage with a world full of intelligent Others.

Many contemporary people understand that other-than-human beings are intelligent and saturated in subjectivity, but the understanding might be more intellectual than experienced, because the dead universe worldview – with which most Westerners are deeply, though perhaps unconsciously, rooted – shapes perception. Those who seldom regard the Others as alive and intelligent may reflexively exclude from our embodied awareness any hint that suggests otherwise – even if we long for wildly intimate, reciprocal encounters and interactions.

What arises in your imagination if you contemplate the possibility that the ordinary "objects" accompanying our days might have life and longings of their own? That the

walls of the house were once part of a living forest; that the water through the tap has a wild origin? If our everyday awareness included felt-recognition of the noble longings of rivers, meadows, or corn, might we question, or even re-envision, our human ventures?

Geneen Marie Haugen, PhD, grew up as a free-range wildish kid with a run amok imagination. She is a guide with the Animas Valley Institute, and is on the faculty of the Esalen Institute, Schumacher College, and the Fox Institute for Creation Spirituality. Excerpt above from this article.

En-Lightening

Tash Shadman

And as I want for
Words to come,
Ideas to flow,
Pain to go,
I suffer my judgment of what is so.

And as I will for
Me to mend,
Feeling to flee,
Them to see,
I suffer my judgment of what be.

And as I worry
I might lose,
They might leave,
Things might rot,
I suffer my judgment of what is not.

And as I wish I
Didn't want,
Didn't will,
Didn't worry,
Didn't wish,
I suffer my judgment of what is.

And then
An opening arises.

And as I witness
What I think,
What I dream up,
What I dread,
I suffer not, but smile instead.

For I can see,
That all these thoughts
Are not me,
Are not real;
They're thoughts I learned,
Not a big deal.
And so I suffer not, but heal.

And as I return
To the now,
To the silence,
To the knowing that all experience
Can be amusing and adored,
I return to myself,
And I suffer no more.

This poem was originally posted on Tash Shadman's website.

The Empty Boat

Chuang Tzu

He who rules men lives in confusion;
He who is ruled by men lives in sorrow.
Tao therefore desired
Neither to influence others
Nor to be influenced by them.
The way to get clear of confusion
And free of sorrow
Is to live with Tao
In the land of the great Void.

If a man is crossing a river
And an empty boat collides with his own skiff,
Even though he be a bad-tempered man
He will not become very angry.
But if he sees a man in the boat,
He will shout at him to steer clear.
If the shout is not heard, he will shout again,
And yet again, and begin cursing.
And all because there is somebody in the boat.
Yet if the boat were empty.
He would not be shouting, and not angry.

If you can empty your own boat
Crossing the river of the world,
No one will oppose you,
No one will seek to harm you.

The straight tree is the first to be cut down,
The spring of clear water is the first to be drained dry.
If you wish to improve your wisdom
And shame the ignorant,
To cultivate your character
And outshine others;
A light will shine around you
As if you had swallowed the sun and the moon:
You will not avoid calamity.

A wise man has said:
"He who is content with himself
Has done a worthless work.
Achievement is the beginning of failure
Fame is beginning of disgrace."

Who can free himself from achievement
He will flow like Tao, unseen
He will go about like Life itself
With no name and no home.

Simple is he, without distinction.
To all appearances he is a fool.
His steps leave no trace. He has no power.
He achieves nothing, has no reputation.
Since he judges no one
No one judges him.
Such is the perfect man:
His boat is empty.

Excerpted from Thomas Merton's translation,
The Way of Chuang Tzu.

A Flame In A Dark Cave

Colin Walsh

It was just another day of that, when it happened. I don't know why, but the teacher suddenly broke off what he was saying and considered us for a moment. A movement like a camera shutter happened behind his eyes. His gaze changed. He leaned against his desk, folded his arms, and then he went off script.

He spoke about how we were going to leave school soon, and head into the world, separately, for ever. He said we wouldn't be able to grasp it yet, but our horizons were about to expand in ways we wouldn't believe. I know it sounds cheesy – it probably was cheesy – but for the teenage me it was a revelation to hear an adult address us like this, not as kids to whom he needed to impart information, but as

humans with whom he wanted to share something like wisdom.

What stayed with me was the image he used: he said our awareness would be like a flame in a dark cave. The brighter and larger the flame grew, the more of the cave we would see. But with every bit of illumination, there would come a growing awareness of the vastness of the cave, of just how little of it we were actually seeing, and of how much more space and opportunity was left for our flame to grow.

According to him, if we were living right, we'd keep growing brighter and more curious as time went by, always seeing more, but with the expanding humility of knowing that insight can't be exhausted; that life isn't about reaching firm conclusions anyway, but about opening yourself to the possibility that you might be wrong, that there's always more to learn.

Our culture tends to fetishize youthful naivety, to pretend that life's a linear movement from the open innocence of youth to jaded experience. But much of my adult life has been the very opposite: it's been about being disabused of my own prejudices; my failures of empathy and imagination; pushing against the seductions of certainty and staying true to that idea of the flame in the cave.

It's a lesson I repeatedly fall short of – almost every time I've done something wrong in my life, really hurt someone, said or done the worst thing – it's been because in that moment I was oblivious to what was beyond my own narrow powers of sight. Every blundering stumble has – in ways often as painful as beautiful – been a feeding of that flame.

Colin Walsh is an author of short stories. He is from Galway and lives in Belgium. Excerpt above from his book, Kala.

When Winnie The Pooh Was Scared

Unknown

"Piglet" said Pooh. "Yes," said Piglet. "I'm scared," said Pooh.

For a moment there was silence. "Would you like to talk about it," asked Piglet, when Pooh didn't appear to be saying anything further.

"I'm just so scared," blurted out Pooh, "so anxious, because I don't feel like things are getting any better. If anything, I feel like they might be getting worse. People are angry because they are so scared and they're turning on one another and there seems to be no clear plan out of here and I worry about my friends and the people I love and I wish so much that I could give them all a hug. And, oh, Piglet, I am so scared and I cannot tell you how much I wish it wasn't."

So Piglet was thoughtful as he looked out at the blue of the skies, peeping between the branches of the trees in the hundred acre wood and listened to his friend.

“I’m here.” He said simply. “I hear you, Pooh, and I’m here.”

For a moment Pooh was perplexed. “But aren’t you going to tell me not to be so silly that I should stop getting myself into a state and pull myself together that it’s hard for everyone right now?” “No,” said Piglet quite decisively. “No, I am very much not going to do any of those things.”

“But,” said Pooh,

“I can’t change the world right now,” continued Piglet. “And I’m not going to patronize you with platitudes about how everything will be okay, because I don’t know that. What I can do, though, Pooh, is, I can make sure that you know that I am here and that I will always be here to listen and to support you and for you to know that you are heard. I can’t make those anxious feelings go away, not really, but I can promise you that all the time I have breath left in my body, you won’t ever need to feel those anxious feelings alone.”

And it was a strange thing because, even as Piglet said that Pooh could feel some of those anxious feelings start to loosen their grip on him, could feel one or two of them start to slither away into the forest, cowed by his friend who sat there solidly next to him.

Pooh thought he had never been more grateful to have Piglet in his life.

Excerpt inspired by Winnie-the-Pooh,
a 1926 children's book by A. A. Milne.

Humility

Lorenz Sell

The dictionary definition of humility is “a modest or low view of one’s own importance.” This always gave me a sense that humility was somehow related to the estimation of my capabilities and that to be humble was to somehow downplay myself.

Occasionally, I encountered explanations where people alluded to some life changing aspect of humility. Although I vaguely connected with this idea intellectually, I struggled to bring its meaning into my own life.

My first entry point into humility came a few years ago while I was on a ten day silent retreat. Between meditations I reflected on a particular person that often triggered me, trying to understand the root cause of my frustration. At one point I had an epiphany that has affected my life ever since.

I realized that I felt triggered because the person was assertive about something that I felt strongly about but ultimately experienced uncertainty around. In truth, my actual orientation to the subject at hand was one of not knowing. My reactivity was an avoidance of the discomfort of that position. As I acknowledged that I didn't know and embraced that not knowing, my attitude transformed from defensiveness into openness and curiosity. I didn't realize it at the time, but that moment was my first genuine experience of humility.

For me, humility has come through recognizing the subtle ways in which arrogance permeates my life. It is the arrogance of needing to be right, of projecting my worldview on to others, of all the judgements and predispositions that I carry with me all the time. It is a filter between my self and the experience of life as it actually is.

Zen Buddhism has the concept called beginners mind – a state of experiencing each moment as if for the first time. For me, humility has been the root of such aspiration and simultaneous acceptance of just how far I often feel from any such mastery. Yet I consider this very recognition to be the seed of humility – what could be more arrogant than thinking that I can be free of judgement and bias as a human being?

The paradox of this experience is that while it has enabled me to create space between my judgements and the world around me, it has also enabled me to be more forgiving of myself as I am, with all of my judgements as they are.

I find the practice ever elusive. As soon as I think – ah, I have found it! – immediately I observe some new facet of my life lacking in humility. My experience has been subtle and paradoxical. Humility is not something that I have

attained. Rather what I have attained is a lasting awareness of my own arrogance. This has gradually opened my mind to the possibility of experiencing the world more directly.

How can I perceive the majesty of life when I am continuously projecting my beliefs on what I experience? My desires, my fears, and my assumptions obscure the actuality of what is there. They make it smaller. They make it something that fits into my conception and comfort zone.

The significance of this nuance is that it is not me that is limited. It is the filter through which I process my experience. And, without that filter, who am "I"? This puts an entirely different spin on the dictionary definition shared earlier. It puts into question the importance of my worldview, not my self. But it also opens an inquiry into the very nature of that self.

Interestingly, the word humility originates from the Latin word humus, meaning earth or ground. The word is related to the word homo, meaning human. Perhaps the virtue's original significance implies humanness or humanity.

As I continue to unpack the many layers of this experience, I wonder how does one learn or teach humility? Is it possible to precipitate an awareness of genuine humility within another?

There is the mythology of master and student. The master engages the student in endless mundane tasks while the student boils over in frustration, waiting to learn the "real" lessons. Perhaps the real lesson is humility and the mundane exercises are there to break down resistance to something that can only be experienced directly.

Excerpted from https://sutra.co/resources/on-humility/.

Coddiwomple

April Rinne

Coddiwomple is one of my all-time favorite words, especially as a metaphor for life. It means *to travel purposefully towards an as-yet-unknown destination.* Isn't that what we're all doing, at the end of the day? So why do we often pretend otherwise?

You can coddiwomple through a city, or you can coddiwomple your career. You can coddiwomple your way to success by defining it on your own terms. Coddiwompling, you realize that "making it" and "getting there" are constantly

evolving, ever changing... and that is the essence of life. Don't fret; enjoy the unexpected discoveries along the way.

Coddiwompling doesn't mean lack of direction; quite the opposite. A coddiwompler has peace of mind because she's not waiting to "become" someone or for something else to happen. She's comfortable getting lost because she knows that's where the truly worthwhile opportunities and aha's are to be found.

The pilgrimage of Camino de Santiago is a microcosm of coddiwompling. True, for most people the "destination" is Santiago de Compostela, yet you quickly learn that's not the *real* journey. The real Camino is the inner journey. It's peeling back the layers of who you are. It's an opportunity to get lost in your thoughts, to gain fresh clarity about your values and priorities, to let go of what no longer serves you... and to leave it on the trail. Because when the Camino (de Santiago) ends, the real Camino (of life) begins.

Give coddiwompling a try today. Open a new door, take a new route, trust your intuition, try that thing you've been dreaming about. See how it feels. Boost your comfort with uncertainty.

One of my favorite Camino sayings: No corras que a donde tienes que llegar es a tí mismo. (Don't run. Where you have to get to is your self.)

April Rinne is the author of Flux.

New Forms Of Religion

Laurence Freeman

However much the great ship of religion may be sinking, we remain spiritual in our needs and aspirations. If we see that religion has a fleet rather than a single battleship, we can see how certain types of old time religion are being taken out of service but other religious forms are under construction. This generation spans the transition. Although we suffer the insecurity of such times we also enjoy the excitement of seeing the new take shape and also the responsibility for contributing to the direction in which we are moving.

We still seek wholeness. It is intrinsic to human identity that, however much we have achieved, we are never satisfied. We hunger and thirst for what lies beyond our grasp and even beyond the horizon of our desire. Religion and spirituality, which are less easy to divorce than we thought — are the elements of culture that deal with this desire beyond desire. Where are they taking us? Where do we have to redefine the old terms by which we try to understand ourselves in this longing for wholeness?

Does secular, for example, always mean faith-less?

The melancholy and self-inflicted wounds of conventional religion and the dramatic, scary rise of fundamentalist religion catch the headlines; but there is also another and, I will suggest here, a more significant kind of religion taking shape around us. This is the resurgence on an unprecedented scale of the contemplative dimension — indeed the heart — of religion. It has always been there,

usually marginalized, sometimes persecuted and has regularly surged in certain periods to challenge the sclerosis and cleanse the arteries of religion. The Sufis of Islam or the mystics of Christianity speak to their spiritual descendants today as if they are our contemporaries. Indeed, in a sense they are. Although we have to adjust to their historically conditioned language and thought, the essence of what they have left us has not passed its use-by date. This is not surprising as what they are concerned with and communicate to us is the timeless.

The inner Light is beyond praise and blame; like space, it knows no boundaries, yet it is even here, within us, ever retaining its serenity and fullness. It is only when you hunt for it that you lose it. You cannot take hold of it, but equally, you cannot get rid of it." (Yung-Chia-Ta-Shih, 7th century)

Today, as traditional forms of institutional religion mutate — this change cannot be measured only by attendance at places of worship — spirituality expands exponentially. This indicates an intensified quest for a form of religious consciousness that arises from and relates to personal concerns and our day-to-day lives. We yearn for a religious experience arising from the indwelling truth of our most real selves. Yet we know intuitively that this inner experience must be connected to and be of benefit to others and to all aspects of our own humanity. If the experience remains self-fixated it degenerates. In the same way eros that does not, at the right moment expand into agape, slowly dies or becomes violent. The 'spiritual' that is not moving into other-centredness and a more inclusive love is just fashion. Through the rise of authentic spirituality, new forms of a less dogmatic, rigid and ritualistic religion are forming. Along with interior experience, self-awareness and transformation we yearn for connection with others even as we enter upon this most solitary of levels. A spirituality that does not form some kind of community remains superficial.

The marriage of contemplation and action which is at the heart of any living faith is manifesting in many new forms of religion today.

Laurence Freeman has been a Benedictine monk for 40+ years. The excerpt above is from his book First Sight.

~ ~

Gratefulness Happens Before Thinking

Brother David Steindl-Rast

My vision of the world? My hope for the future? This topic sounds a bit big. Allow me to start small — say, with crows. They are my special friends. Just as I am writing these lines, one of them, the shy one among my three regular guests, is gobbling up the Kitty Fritters I put out for them. This brings to mind a short poem by Robert Frost that might provide a stepping-stone for our deliberations about world-vision and hope for the future — if any.

The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree
Has given my heart
A change of mood
A nd saved some part
Of a day I had rued.

Surely you will remember a similar experience of your own: some quirky little incident made you smile, changed your mood, and suddenly the world looked brighter. If this ever happened to you, the key for understanding a causal chain of great consequence is in your hand: any change in attitude changes the way one sees the world, and this in turn changes the way one acts. When Robert Frost

claims that the crow's little trick "saved" part of a day he had rued, or of which he repented, he means this in the full sense of a redeeming change of heart. When he got home, I'm sure he greeted Mrs. Frost in a better mood than he would have been able to do without the crow's nudge. And there is no telling what this did to her — and to the way she treated the dog afterwards, or talked more kindly to her neighbor.

But what exactly triggered this fortunate chain reaction? What gave Frost's heart "a change of mood"? Put yourself in his shoes as he is slouching moodily through the woods. Then feel that sudden dusting with snow. Doesn't it wake you up from your brooding? An interruption like this could make you angry if you insisted on staying preoccupied with your problems.

But — surprise — the cold spray makes you snap out of being wrapped in yourself, and you face the given: a hemlock tree, a crow, melting snow in your neck. Bingo! A saving change of mood. What caused this change was gratefulness.

Gratefulness? I hear a chorus of disbelief. Admittedly, Frost didn't feel like thanking the crow. But gratefulness is more than giving thanks. Thanking comes with thinking. Gratefulness happens before thinking — in that brief gap between "the dust of snow" and thought. It is the spontaneous response of the human heart to the gratuitously given. This gratefulness releases energy. In the gap of surprise before the first thought, the powerful surge of an intelligence that far surpasses thought takes hold of us. We can make our thinking a tool of this creative intelligence that constantly brings forth and sustains the world. If we willingly open ourselves to its gentle force, it has power to change whatever is not in tune with it. Gratitude is thinking in tune with the cosmic intelligence that inspires us in grateful moments. It can change more than a mood; it can change a world.

Brother David Steindl Rast is a
96-year-old benedictine monk.

There Are Many Voices Beside Ours

Ella Cara Deloria

We [Native Americans] know about silence. We are not afraid of it. In fact, for us, silence is more powerful than words. Our elders were trained in the ways of silence, and

they handed over this knowledge to us. Observe, listen, and then act, they would tell us. That was the manner of living.

With [most of] you, it is just the opposite. You learn by talking. You reward the children that talk the most at school. In your parties, you all try to talk at the same time. In your work, you are always having meetings in which everybody interrupts everybody and all talk five, ten or a hundred times. And you call that 'solving a problem'. When you are in a room and there is silence, you get nervous. You must fill the space with sounds. So you talk compulsorily, even before you know what you are going to say.

[Modern] people love to discuss. They don't even allow the other person to finish a sentence. They always interrupt. For us Indians, this looks like bad manners or even stupidity. If you start talking, I'm not going to interrupt you. I will listen. Maybe I'll stop listening if I don't like what you are saying, but I won't interrupt you.

When you finish speaking, I'll make up my mind about what you said, but I will not tell you I don't agree unless it is important. Otherwise, I'll just keep quiet and I'll go away. You have told me all I need to know. There is no more to be said. But this is not enough for the majority of [modern] people.

People should regard their words as seeds. They should sow them, and then allow them to grow in silence. Our elders taught us that the earth is always talking to us, but we should keep silent in order to hear her.

There are many voices besides ours. Many voices.

Ella Cara Deloria, also called Aŋpétu Wašté Wiŋ, was a Yankton Dakota educator, anthropologist, ethnographer, linguist, and novelist. She recorded Native American oral history and contributed to the study of Native American languages.

The Practice Before The Practice

Mark Nepo

From the moment we open our eyes, we are meaning-seeking creatures, looking for what matters though we carry what matters deep within us. And more than the hard-earned understandings we arrive at, more than the principles or beliefs we stitch together out of our experience, how we stay in relationship to the mysterious Whole of Life is what brings

us alive and keeps us alive. Everyone knows firsthand that life is messy and painful, beautiful and unpredictable. The endless practice is keeping our heart open to the whole of it. And the journey of becoming who we were born to be never ends. It's limitless, eternal. We don't arrive—we grow.

I believe and give my heart to the notion that spirituality is listening for and living into the soul's place on Earth. A life of spirit, regardless of the path we choose, begins with a person's acceptance that they are part of something larger than themselves. The want to know who we really are and to know the truth of our existence and our connection to a living Universe is, to me, the fundamental life-giving question that the heart commits to once opened by love or suffering. How we are led and pushed to our true nature is what spirituality and personal growth are all about. At the heart of each spiritual tradition are the questions: how to be in the world without losing what matters, and is living an awakened life of any use if we don't bring what matters to bear on the world? Though every path offers some form of refuge, the journey of every human being is to discover—through their personhood—their own living relationship between the soul and the world, between being and experience, and between love and service.

Every single being has an amazing, unfathomable gift that only meeting life head-on and heart-on will reveal. And we can't fully know our gift alone. We need each other to discover the gift, to believe in the gift. And then, to learn how to use it. The challenge for each of us is not to discount our gift because of the indifference of others, and not to abdicate our gift because of the various weights we're forced to carry. My hope is that we will better know our own true nature and the depth of our own resources by being in conversation with the inner terrain as it opens, including how to restore our trust in life, when suffering makes us lose our way; how to begin the work of saying yes to life, so it can enliven us; and how to make our inwardness a resource and not a refuge.

There is always a practice before the practice; a sitting before the incomprehensible long enough to feel and sometimes understand the mystery each instrument and craft is designed to invoke.

In Japan, before an apprentice can clay up his hands and work the wheel, he must watch the master potter for years. In Hawaii, before a young man can ever touch a boat, he must sit on the cliff of his ancestors and simply watch the sea. In Africa, before the children are allowed to drum, they must rub the length of skin stretched over wood and dream of the animal whose heart will guide their hands. In Vienna, the prodigy must visit the piano maker before ever fingering a scale; to see how the keys are carved and put into place. And in Switzerland legend has it that before the master watchmaker can couple his tiny gears, he must sit long enough to feel the passage of time.

Starting this way enables a love of the process that is life-giving. The legendary cellist Pablo Casals was asked at 92 why he still practiced four hours a day. He smiled and replied, “Because I believe I’m making progress.”

It is this sort of deep progress that saves us.

Mark Nepo is a poet, teacher, storyteller and author.
Excerpt above from The Endless Practice:
Becoming Who You Were Born to Be

The Vessel And The Filter

Rick Rubin

Each of us has a container within. It is constantly being filled with data. It holds the sum total of our thoughts, feelings, dreams, and experiences in the world. Let's call this the vessel.

Information does not enter the vessel directly. Like rain filling a barrel. It is filtered in a unique way for each of us.

Not everything makes it through this filter. And what does get through doesn't always do so faithfully.

We each have our own method of reducing Source. Our memory space is limited. Our senses often misperceive data. And our minds don't have the processing power to take in all the information surrounding us. Our senses would be overwhelmed by light, color, sound, and smell. We would not be able to distinguish one object from another.

To navigate our way through this immense world of data, we learn early in life to focus on information that appears essential or of particular interest. And to tune out the rest.

As artists, we seek to restore our childlike perception: a more innocent state of wonder and appreciation not tethered to utility or survival.

Our filter inevitably reduces Source intelligence by interpreting the data that arrives instead of letting it pass freely. As the vessel fills with these recast fragments, relationships are created with the material already collected.

These relationships produce beliefs and stories. They may be about who we are, the people around us, and the nature of the world we live in. Eventually, these stories coalesce into a worldview.

As artists, we want to hold these stories softly and find space for the vast amount of information that doesn't fit easily within the limits of our belief system. The more raw data we take in, and the less we shape it, the closer we get to nature.

Rick Rubin is renowned record producer. Excerpt above from his book, The Creative Act: A Way of Being

~ ~

What You Are Is Perfect Imperfection

Emannuel

Your less evolved areas have a right to be.
They whisper of things past.
They whisper of confusion, of unfulfillment
and of the pain of the soul separated from its God
and the longing for that Oneness again.

Realize that on this earth
there can be only relative perfection.
Realize too that you do not need to be perfect
to be loved. Love each other in your imperfections,
tenderly and completely. Be gentle with yourselves.
The demand for perfection on the physical plane
can be your worst enemy.

To insist on perfection precludes growth.
To accept imperfection as part of your humanness
is to grow.
If you can love the part of you that you think
is imperfect
then the act of transformation can begin.
When you judge it and throw it out of your heart
it becomes a hardened shell that blocks the Light.

If you deny, what is your nature?
you become deeply attached to that denial.
When you accept what is there, in its truth,
then you are released.
One does not release through rejection.
One releases through love.

To strive for Light is a beautiful calling
but you cannot find the Light
until you acknowledge the darkness.
Souls who strive in perfect yearning
are as close to perfection
as anyone in human form can be.
Who you are is a necessary step
to being who you will be, and so it goes
through eternity .

Be comfortable but not complacent
with your imperfections.

Who demands perfection?
Only you souls who are locked in human form
believe somehow that perfection is the requirement.
It is not. The requirement is sincerity,
an open heart.
That is the perfection that is demanded -
the perfect longing.

The perfection of the universe
is an encompassing reality
around the imperfection
of your human world.

From Emmanuel's Book, *Introduction by Ram Dass,*
Compiled by Pat Rodegast and Judith Stanton

Compulsion To Closure

Joan Tollifson

Somewhere recently, I heard or read the phrase, “compulsion to closure.” I can’t recall how it was used by whoever said it, but it feels like a great description of our human difficulty in tolerating unresolvability and uncertainty, and our compulsive desire to pin things down, get a grip, secure a foothold, nail down the right answer, figure everything out, and know The Final Truth with doubtless

certainty. This compulsion has obvious survival benefits in practical matters, but when it translates over into other realms, it easily becomes a problem.

This compulsion to arrive at the Final Truth is, of course, foiled again and again by life itself, which simply doesn't seem to stay put in any of the neat and tidy little boxes into which we try to put it. And so, for as long as we are trying to find this kind of certainty, it is pretty much guaranteed that uncertainty and doubt will always be nipping at our heels.

That nipping produces a kind of anxiety in us, an uneasiness, which sets us up to be easily attracted to people and systems that offer seemingly comprehensive answers that explain how the universe works and that promise us the kind of safety, security and certainty for which we long. But for many of us, these answers never really satisfy us. And paradoxically, when we stop searching for certainty and focus instead on the immediacy of present experiencing, without trying to grasp or understand it, this anxiety vanishes. We don't actually need any Final Truth. [...]

My friend and teacher Toni Packer always stressed that she was not an authority, that anything she said could be questioned or taken further, that we should test it out for ourselves. She was always willing to look at a question freshly, to start from scratch. She was open to seeing something new, to changing her mind. She was like a scientist in her approach, but she was also religious in the sense that her exploration was not the objective (dualistic, subject/object) kind that science engages in, but rather, it was a nondual subjective (contemplative, meditative) exploration of our firsthand experiencing.

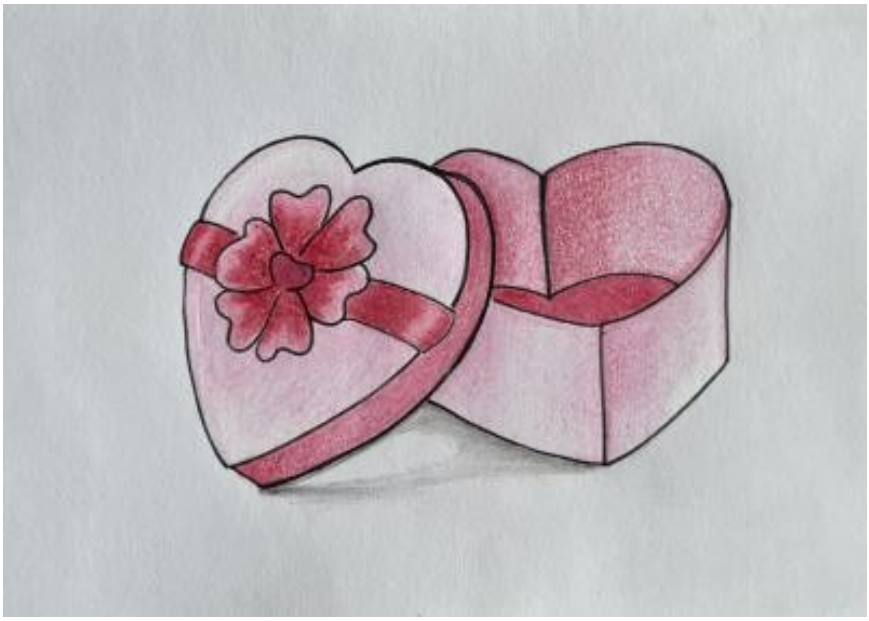
This living actuality can never be pinned down or grasped. It is moving and changing—never the same way for even an instant. And yet, in another sense it is immovably always right here, right now in this ever-present immediacy or presence that we can never actually leave. This one bottomless moment is infinite and eternal, without beginning

or end, without edges or limits. It has no inside and outside. It is undivided and indivisible. There is infinite diversity and variation, and yet it all shows up as one seamless whole. There are apparent polarities, but they only appear relative to each other, and they can never actually be pulled apart.

Reality is simple. It is right here. Present experiencing, just as it is. The morning breeze, THIS cup of tea, the beloved dog trotting toward me, the green leaves, the blossoming flowers, the galaxies dying and being born millions of light years away—this whole amazing magic show. And yet, we can never really pin it down, get hold of it, or explain it in any final way. We ARE it. This indivisible present happening is both obvious and inconceivable. It never resolves into any final shape, it never departs from this present immediacy, and we are never separate from it.

So is it possible to be okay with not having any Final Truth? Can we live with the openness of not knowing, of groundlessness? Can we be at home with the absence of closure, and with the fluidity and multiplicity of dimensions in which life is presenting itself moment by moment? Actually, we have no choice. But in not resisting this, it may turn out to be enjoyable and miraculous, even when it apparently isn't.

Excerpted from Joan Tollifson's newsletter. She is author of Nothing to Grasp, Painting the Sidewalk with Water, Awake in the Heartland*, and* Bare-Bones Meditation. *Tollifson writes and talks with people about the living reality here and now. She has an affinity with both Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta(in Hinduism), but belongs to no formal tradition.*



Tale Of The Ringless Ring

Thomas Moore

Nasrudin was a spiritual leader and teacher in a small village. He was honored and respected as a mullah, although he was rather unusual and unpredictable.

One day a man of great virtue in the village came to Nasrudin with some news. "My business requires that I move to a town far away, and I regret that I have to leave our beautiful village and the benefits of having you as a spiritual guide and teacher," he said to Nasrudin.

The honored teacher looked sad and said, "I'm very sorry to see you go. I hope you can stay in touch with us, with me."

"I don't know what it will mean to live far away," the man said. "But I had an idea. I have long admired the beautiful ring you wear on the finger of your right hand, and

I thought, if you were to give me that ring, every time I looked at my hand and saw that ring I'd think of you."

Now, Nasrudin had his virtues and his ordinary vices. One thing he did not like to do is to part with things that were precious to him.

"I have a better idea," he said. "Why don't I keep my ring. Then, every day you look at your hand and see that my ring is not there, you will think of me."

This is a perfect story of emptiness. Instead of seeing something, you see nothing, and that nothing is meaningful. The townsman's attitude is standard: He is about to lose touch with this teacher, so he looks for something. This is how we deal with change and loss. We look for something, anything, to fill the gap.

But Nasrudin is wiser than he looks. He demonstrates the importance of wit and humor in paradoxical teachings. He comes up with a better idea, seeing value in the potential for emptiness he notices in his neighbor. He also perceives that by introducing nothingness in a positive way, he advances the teacher-student relationship. The empty, ringless, unnoticeable finger is the perfect solution.

This leads to broader questions: What place does emptiness have in our relationships? Is it better sometimes not to have physical signs of closeness and love? Is it good to doubt your beloved's devotion to you? Do the things we use to express our love get in the way? You give an expensive gift on an anniversary or on Valentine's Day. Would it be better to find a nongift, an empty gift, one that doesn't cost much or doesn't cost anything, that is not traditional, that has no obvious message?

Thomas Moore is the author of thirty books.
Excerpt above from The Eloquence of Silence.

Shadow Cannot Drive Out Shame

Bonnie Rose

I was taught to affirm, “I am whole, perfect, and complete.” I didn’t have good definitions of those words at the time. So my ego said, “Really? I am? Well thank you for noticing!” Then I strove to uphold my ego’s definition of “whole, perfect, and complete,” again trying to achieve myself into acceptability.

In metaphysical teachings, sometimes the ego takes hold, and we develop a second shadow that covers shame with a ghostly illusion of spirituality. Our fellow travelers on a spiritual path become new targets for comparison. We try to be as spiritual as others to prove our acceptability. But the shadow of trying to "be more spiritual" wrestles with the shadow of shame—and the wrestling match drags us into a deeper pit.

Dr. Martin Luther King said, "Hate cannot drive out hate," and "Darkness cannot drive out darkness." The same is true for the shadow and shame. Shadow cannot drive out shame. Shame cannot drive out shadow. When we attempt to fix a shadow with a shadow, we either fail outright; or we fail by false success—in other words, we think we conquer the shadow, but really we just temporarily contain it. We cram a roiling stew of shadow into a tight Tupperware. We seal the lid and stick it in storage. Suppression invites the shadow to ferment and eventually explode into a pseudo-poltergeist that interferes with the fullness of life.

I know for me, when my ego was in charge—if I ever had moments of brokenness, imperfection, or incompletion—I pressed myself into the metaphorical Tupperware with gusto. I would not allow the power of a negative thought. I prayed my tank-like prayers to invoke outer symbols of success. I believed if I could just apply enough evidentiary band-aids to fasten my life together, then people would think I was okay. They would think I was "doing it right," that I was truly as "whole, perfect, and complete" as all the really gifted spiritual people were. If I could just get other people to accept me, then maybe I could accept myself. I worked hard at acceptability and was fairly successful -- that is until the shame-filled Tupperware exploded again, and I found myself wiping up a mess of pain with a self-rejecting ego.

Eventually I entered into a mystical, non-dual path and learned new definitions of "whole, perfect, and complete." Wholeness includes brokenness; perfect literally means inclusive of everything; complete means evolving. I

incorporated this paradoxical wisdom into my life and became gentler with myself and others.

Richard Rohr says, "What you do not transform, you will transmit." I looked at my life and compassionately observed my transmittal of suppressed shame. My transmittal took many forms—hypersensitivity, eye-rolling, defensiveness, and criticism of self and others. My heightened awareness of transmitted shame brought me to a new place of paradox and willingness.

I was willing to see how the shame-inducing ego is part of love's plan, but not in the way I thought it was. Shame doesn't exist to make us smaller; it exists to call us to inner greatness through humility. We acknowledge shame. We befriend our humanity and offer it compassion. Our compassion inspires us to regard ourselves unconditionally. Then we transcend our imagined limits of acceptability through the powers of grace, forgiveness, and love. In other words, we love ourselves beyond our capacity to love ourselves. We learn to let God love through us. This lovingness extends to our love for others as well.

Bonnie Rose is a minister with Ventura's Center for Spiritual Living. Above reading was excerpted from her book, Dances with Dogs.

Praying With The News

Rabbi Yael Levy

The 17th of the Hebrew month Tammuz initiates a three-week period of mourning that leads to *Tisha b'Av*, which is the day that marks the destruction of the Temples in Jerusalem in 586 BCE and 70 CE.

Tradition teaches that the Temple was destroyed because hatred became the operating principle in the community. The scorn, contempt and disdain that

characterized daily interactions caused the Divine Presence to flee and leave the Temple vulnerable to attack.

These next three weeks ask us to reflect on the hatred that we allow to take root in our hearts. The wisdom of the tradition acknowledges that hatred can sometimes feel energizing and "so right," but allowing it to fill our bodies and guide our actions leads to destruction.

Many years ago I was taught the practice of praying with the news. I have shared it over the years and always find myself returning to it during this season.

In this practice, each time we read or listen to a news report that enrages us, we turn our attention to those harmed by what is happening and pray for their healing and well-being. Doing so encourages us to acknowledge feelings of anger, grief and despair, and at the same time it turns our attention toward connection and compassion. Praying with the news can help us learn to bear witness to devastation and mayhem, while keeping our hearts soft, our minds calm, and our actions clear.

I am struggling mightily with this practice these days in the wake of continued violence and oppression in this country and throughout the world. Hatred can sometimes feel like such a welcome harbor. Not only does it feel so right, it can also act as a shield, creating the illusion that I don't have to acknowledge the grief and heartbreak I am experiencing.

I need practices to help quiet the rage and fear, to loosen the constriction of hatred and to help me be with overwhelming grief. I need practices to help me return to compassion, love, joy and possibility. I find praying with the news both painful and helpful. It keeps me connected, allows sorrow, and grounds me in care and love.

Rabbi Yael Levy is author, mindfulness teacher and rabbinic director of A Way In.
Jewish Forward named one of "America's Most Inspiring Rabbis"

Sound Of The Genuine

Howard Thurman

There is in every person something that waits and listens for the sound of the genuine ... There is in you something that waits and listens for the sound of the genuine in yourself. Nobody like you has ever been born and no one like you will ever be born again—you are the only one.

If you cannot hear it, you will never find whatever it is for which you are searching and if you hear it and then do not

follow it, it was better that you had never been born. You are the only you that has ever lived; your idiom is the only idiom of its kind in all the existences, and if you cannot hear the sound of the genuine in you, you will all of your life spend your days on the ends of strings that somebody else pulls.

The sound of the genuine is flowing through you. Don't be deceived and thrown off by all the noises that are part even of your dreams and your ambitions when you don't hear the sound of the genuine in you. Because that is the only true guide you will ever have and if you don't have that you don't have a thing ... Cultivate the discipline of listening to the sound of the genuine in yourself.

There is something in everybody that waits and listens for the sound of the genuine in other people... I must wait and listen for the sound of the genuine in you. I must wait. For if I cannot hear it, then in my scheme of things, you are not ever present. So as I live my life then, this is what I am trying to fulfill...that I'm secure because I hear the sound of the genuine in myself, and having learned to listen to that, I can become quiet enough, still enough to hear the sound of the genuine in you.

Now if I hear the sound of the genuine in me and if you hear the sound of the genuine in you, it is possible for me to go down in [my spirit] and come up in [your spirit]. So that when I look at myself through your eyes having made that pilgrimage, I see in me what you see in me. [Then] the wall that separates and divides will disappear, and we will become one -- because the sound of the genuine makes the same music.

Howard Thurman was a social pioneer, compassionate mystic and mentor to Martin Luther King Jr. (who introduced him to Gandhi). Excerpt above from Baccalaureate address at Spelman College in 1980.

Pain Expands Our Capacity For Joy

Nikole Lim

Daily, my work requires me to delve into the hellish reality of unimaginable experiences of gross abuse. Neither words nor images can fully convey the emotional crises, psychological torment, and heart-wrenching pain that my daughters in these places have been forced to endure. When I feel like giving up under the weight of violent injustice, I am reminded of their stories. The survivors who refuse to give up, live into the new day—graciously extending themselves on behalf of others through their advocacy efforts, through their educational dreams, and through their compassion for other versions of themselves. Their shared experiences with me give me hope to also live into the new day—pursuing the vocational call toward justice once more.

In this journey of learning to love, my community of survivors taught me how. When words could not express the

pain in hearts—we would sing and we would dance, we would cry and we would laugh—we would remind ourselves of the beauty we see in each other. I've seen that they are not defined by their past of trauma, but they are thriving through their rewritten stories—stories that are filled with audacious dreams. When given the opportunities to pursue those dreams again, we see that brokenness is not something to be hidden—but unveiled as a thing of beauty.

At every juncture of grief where my spirit was cracked to the point of no return, came an experience that mended it back together—reminding me that these survivors were the leaders I've been waiting for. It became very clear to me that the oppressed would be the ones to lead us into liberation. Through their stories, their wisdom, through their experiences of pain and their models of love, survivors have the potential to become the most powerful leaders in our midst.

I have learned that healing is hidden in the most unexpected places—in brokenness, in pain, in despair, in suffering because that is where love's presence is a necessity. Just as light coexists together with darkness to make a photograph visible, the juxtaposition of seemingly opposing attributes have the potential to expand the capacity of our heart.

Pain expands our capacity for joy—simultaneously deepening and elevating our heart's potential to experience a broader spectrum of pain and joy together. Without the experience of pain, we wouldn't know what joy could be. I never knew what it was like to laugh unrestricted until being in community with survivors who have experienced so much pain, yet were able to laugh with freedom. They taught me how to experience joy, observe beauty, embody hope, and expand in love in ways that I never knew before.

Nikole Lim is a filmmaker who started
Freely in Hope *and authored* Liberation is Here.

Beginner's Mind Vs. Expert Mind

Christina Feldman

We collect, store, and accumulate so much weight in this life. The thousands of thoughts, ideas, and plans we have are imprinted on our minds. We have engaged in countless conversations and have replayed many of them over and over again. We have moved from one experience to another, one encounter to another, and we think about them all. Information and knowledge has been gathered, digested, and stored, and we carry all of this with us. This input forms our story, the story we have about people, ourselves, and the world. Experiencing the chaos and turbulence of the saturated mind and heart, forgetfulness may look like a blessing. Yet our innate capacity to receive the world, a source of both complexity and of compassion, will always be with us.

The beginner's mind has a simple vocabulary founded upon questioning and the willingness to learn. There are Zen meditative traditions that rest upon bringing one simple question into each moment: "What is this?" Whatever arises in our hearts, minds, and bodies is greeted with a probing investigation. What is this thought, this body, this experience, this feeling, this interaction, this moment? It is a question intended to dissolve all assumptions, images, opinions, and familiarity. It is a question that brings a welcoming presence into each moment; a question that perceives neither obstacles nor enemies; a question that appreciates the rich seam of learning offered in every encounter and moment. It is an "every moment" practice, in which our capacity to listen and attend unconditionally is treasured as the means of transformation.

The expert's mind has a different vocabulary, expressing a devotion to "knowing" deeper than the devotion to freedom. The expert's mind is the mind entangled with its history, accumulated opinions and judgments, and past experience. The most frequently occurring word in the mind of the expert is "again." What a long story the word "again" can carry. We can sense the shutters of our heart closing as we whisper to ourselves, "This thought, this feeling, this pain, this person again." The intrusion of the past with all its comparisons, weariness, aversion, or boredom has the power to create a powerful disconnection in that moment. The word "again" carries with it the voice of knowing, fixing, and dismissing, and with its appearance we say farewell to mystery, to wonder, to openness, and to learning. Whenever we are not touched deeply by the moment we say farewell to the beginner's mind. An ancient teacher reminds us, "There is great enlightenment where there is great wonder. . . ."

How much of the knowledge, information, and strategies of our story serve us well? In our life story we experience hurt, pain, fear and rejection, at times caused by others, at others self-inflicted. Understanding what causes sorrow, pain, and devastation translates into discriminating

wisdom, and we do not knowingly expose ourselves to these conditions. We are all asked to make wise choices in our lives -- choices rooted in understanding rather than fear.

The Buddha used the analogy of a raft. Walking beside a great river, the bank we are standing on is dangerous and frightening and the other bank is safe. We collect branches and foliage to build a raft to transport us to the other shore. Having made the journey safely, supposing we picked up the raft and carried it on our head wherever we went. Would we be using the raft wisely? The obvious answer is "No." A reasonable person would know how useful the raft has been, but wisdom would be to leave the raft behind and walk on unencumbered.

Christina Feldman is a dharma teacher and author of Boundless Heart: The Buddha's Path of Kindness, Compassion, Joy, and Equanimity.

Radical Optimism

Rev. Joan Halifax

Radical optimism is a big view of the moment that does not include outcome. Another way of saying this is that the radical optimist is not undertaking an investment plan. Rather he or she is involved in a plan free of design.

Bearing witness in Auschwitz or on the streets of the Bowery is just bearing witness. Only a radical optimist can bear witness; if there is a thought to outcome, then one cannot be with the truth of what is actually happening.

Why are so many of us looking for the big spiritual payoff? We will all be dead soon enough. So what's the big deal? Are we hoping to have a good death? Is that what drives us? Or do we want to make it in the spiritual big-time here and now?

Trungpa Rinpoche, when he used the phrase "spiritual materialism," was not just referring to the material adornments of the spiritual path, the material bells and whistles of practice. He was directly addressing our desire to "get enlightenment," the big bell and whistle. In our lives, there are endless truth events; each moment is one. If practice is self serving and a means to a so-called greater end, then practice becomes an investment where you expect a profit. How can we be at one with a particular moment if we are expecting something?

Practice not entered for the goal of enlightenment is simply being in life. When thoughts of outcome guide our actions, then we are caught in the great dilemma of dualism. Being with no gaining idea is the practice of radical optimism, an optimism free of time and space, object and subject, yet embedded in the very stuff of our daily lives. It is an optimism that arises from what Bernie Glassman calls not knowing, or what Vimalakirti called the inconceivable.

Dogen reminds us that to raise the mind of compassionate awakening is none other than the whole of daily activity with no concern for one's self, no thought of outcome, no sense of self-gratification. This is radical optimism. It means that whatever is, is the best that there is at this moment. Just this, wholly this, only this.

Rev. Joan Halifax is a teacher, anthropologist, ecologist, civil rights activist, hospice caregiver, and the author of several books.

Forgiveness

Wayne Dyer

Forgiveness is the most powerful thing that you can do for your physiology and your spirituality, and it remains one of the least attractive things to us, largely because our egos rule so unequivocally. To forgive is somehow associated with saying that it is all right, that we accept the evil deed. But this is not forgiveness.

Forgiveness means that you fill yourself with love and you radiate that love outward and refuse to hang onto the venom or hatred that was engendered by the behaviors that caused the wounds. Forgiveness is a spiritual act of love for yourself and it sends a message to everyone, including

yourself, that you are an object of love and that that is what you are going to impart.

This is the process of unbonding from old wounds and no longer hanging onto them as prized possessions. It means letting go of the language of blame and self-pity and no longer leading with one's wounds and injuries from the past. It means privately forgiving and not asking anyone else to understand. It means leaving behind the eye-for-an-eye attitude that only makes for more pain and the need for more revenge, and replacing it with an attitude of love and forgiveness. The spiritual literature available to us from all religious persuasions honors this way.

Feeling worthy is essential to being able to [stay rooted in what you most deeply value]. It is simply a matter of common sense. If you don't feel that you deserve something, why would the divine energy that is in all things send it your way? Thus, you must shift to knowing that you and the divine energy are one and the same, and that it is your ego that is conniving to keep you from knowing the power of this in your own life.

Wayne Dyer was an American self-help author and a motivational speaker.

The Simplest Meditation: Waiting

Peter Russell

For most of us waiting is not easy, often a bore. Waiting for a bus or train, we look for something to do to pass the time. Sitting in a doctor's waiting room, we idle away the minutes thumbing through magazines of no particular interest.

We want the waiting to be over with, so that we can get on with whatever is the next task at hand. Yet in treating waiting this way, we deny ourselves a most valuable opportunity.

Pure waiting, not waiting for any event to happen, just waiting without wanting, can be a profound spiritual practice.

When you simply wait, not waiting for anything in particular, not wishing things were different than they are, the

mind relaxes. And, as you let go of wanting, you will probably find your awareness of the present moment expanding.

Many spiritual guides have encouraged us to be more aware of the present, to "be here, now". And numerous practices aim to help us become more aware of the present. Most, however, lead to focusing of the attention on some aspect of the present—the breath, a visual object, a mantra. The focus may be effortless, nevertheless it is there, a very faint directing of the attention.

With pure waiting, on the other hand, there is no attempt to be aware of any particular aspect of the present. Instead, with nothing to do, no particular thing to wait for, there is space for more of the present to reveal itself. We begin to notice aspects of our world we were not aware of before—the sound of a clock, or a distant conversation; a tree gently waving in the breeze; the touch of clothes against the skin. It does not matter what. It will probably be different every time, simply because the present is different from one moment to the next.

As you get the hang of simply waiting, you will find yourself being present in a relaxed, innocent, undirected way. So the next time you have to wait for something, use the time as an opportunity to become more awake. Instead of waiting for that something, simply wait. No expectations. Simply stopping, and waiting, with an open mind.

Nor do we need to wait for a late bus or be sitting in a "waiting room" before we can practice waiting. Any moment of the day we can choose to pause for a while and simply wait.

Waiting without expectation for whatever is next. Maybe a bird flies past the window. Perhaps the refrigerator starts up. Or we find we have wandered off on some thought. It doesn't matter. Waiting is.

Excerpted from
https://www.peterrussell.com/SP/Waiting.php

Irony Of Marriage

Neale Donald Walsch

Largely, marriage has been used by those societies, religions, and families as a mini-prison, as kind of a contractual arrangement that says: "Everything will be, now and forevermore, the way it is in just this moment." [...] And so the very thing which should unlimit people and release the spirit within them, works against that and limits people and closes that spirit down.

That's the irony of marriage as we've created it. We say, "I do," and from the moment we say, "I do," we can't do the things that we would really love to do in life, in largest measure. Now, very few people would admit this in the first throes of romance and in the first moments after their wedding. They would only come to these conclusions three, or five, or--what's the famous phrase, the seven-year itch--seven years later, when they suddenly realize that, in fact, their experience of themselves in the world at large has been reduced, and not enlarged, by the institution of marriage.

That's not true, of course, in all marriages, naturally. But it's true in enough of them -- I'm going to say, in the majority of them. And that is why we have such a high divorce rate, because it isn't so much that people have gotten tired of each other, not nearly so often as they've gotten tired of the restrictions and the limitations that marriage seems to have imposed upon them. The human heart knows when it's being asked to be less.

Now love, on the other hand, is all about freedom. The very definition of love is freedom itself. Love is that

which is free and knows no limitation, restriction, or condition of any kind. And so I would think that what we have done here is that we have created an artificial construction around that which is least artificial. Love is the most authentic experience within the framework of the human adventure. And yet in the midst of this grand authenticity, we have created these artificial constrictions. And that makes it very difficult for people to stay in love.

And so what we have to do is reconstruct marriage, if we're going to have marriage at all, in a way that says: "I do not limit you. There is no condition that makes it okay for us to remain together. I do not have any desire to cause you to be less in your expression of yourself, in any way. Indeed, what this marriage is intended to do, this new form of marriage, is to fuel the engine of your experience--the experience of who you really are and who you choose to be."

And one last thing that the New Marriage does: it says, "I recognize that even you, yourself, will change. Your ideas will change, your tastes will change, your desires will change. Your whole understanding of Who You Are had better change, because if it doesn't change, you've become a very static personality over a great many years, and nothing would displease me more. And I recognize that the process of evolution will produce changes in you."

This new form of marriage not only allows for such changes, but it encourages them.

Neale Donald Walsh is the author of 39 books. Excerpt above from https://www.livinglifefully.com/flo/flobemarriage.htm

Letting Someone Know They're Not Alone Is No Small Thing

Deborah Hawkins

Months ago, I decided to explore volunteering for a hospice organization.

My initial curiosity came up when I contemplated wanting to use my talents for listening and putting things into words. I envisioned being able to help terminally ill patients write letters that crystallized unexpressed feelings and attain a sort of peace.

I wanted to be of service, but I largely was motivated by the thought of doing something I do well. This didn't seem right to me. The spirit of volunteering demanded that my efforts had to be FOR the people I wanted to serve.

I researched hospice organizations. Almost two months after submitting an application, my first shift took place.

Understanding that hearing is generally the last sense to leave a person, I put together a few playlists on Spotify that I could play on my phone as I sat bedside.

I had classical mixes and assembled a wonderful set of gospel tunes, but that's not what I was called to provide.

The staff social worker directed me to visit Pete, whose family was coming in later in the morning. I was told he really liked Otis Redding.

When I stepped into his room, I introduced myself and asked if I could sit and visit for a while even though I knew he couldn't answer me. I sat by his bed and fumbled with my

phone. I felt unprepared. I babbled short acknowledgments out loud, like confirming that his family was going to come in soon, and, in my head, wished him peace.

I looked for changes in his demeanor, trying to discern whether a small unconscious body movement reflected distress and warranted a call to the nurse, as I finally located "This is Otis Redding," on my phone app.

His eyes were open but expressionless while we listened to "Sitting on the Dock of the Bay." I noticed that the time he took between breaths was getting longer, but his inhalations were not labored. He wasn't agitated. The next track started.

When the night has come
And the land is dark
And the moon is the only light we see.
No, I won't be afraid.
No, I won't be afraid.
Just as long as you stand by me
Stand by me.

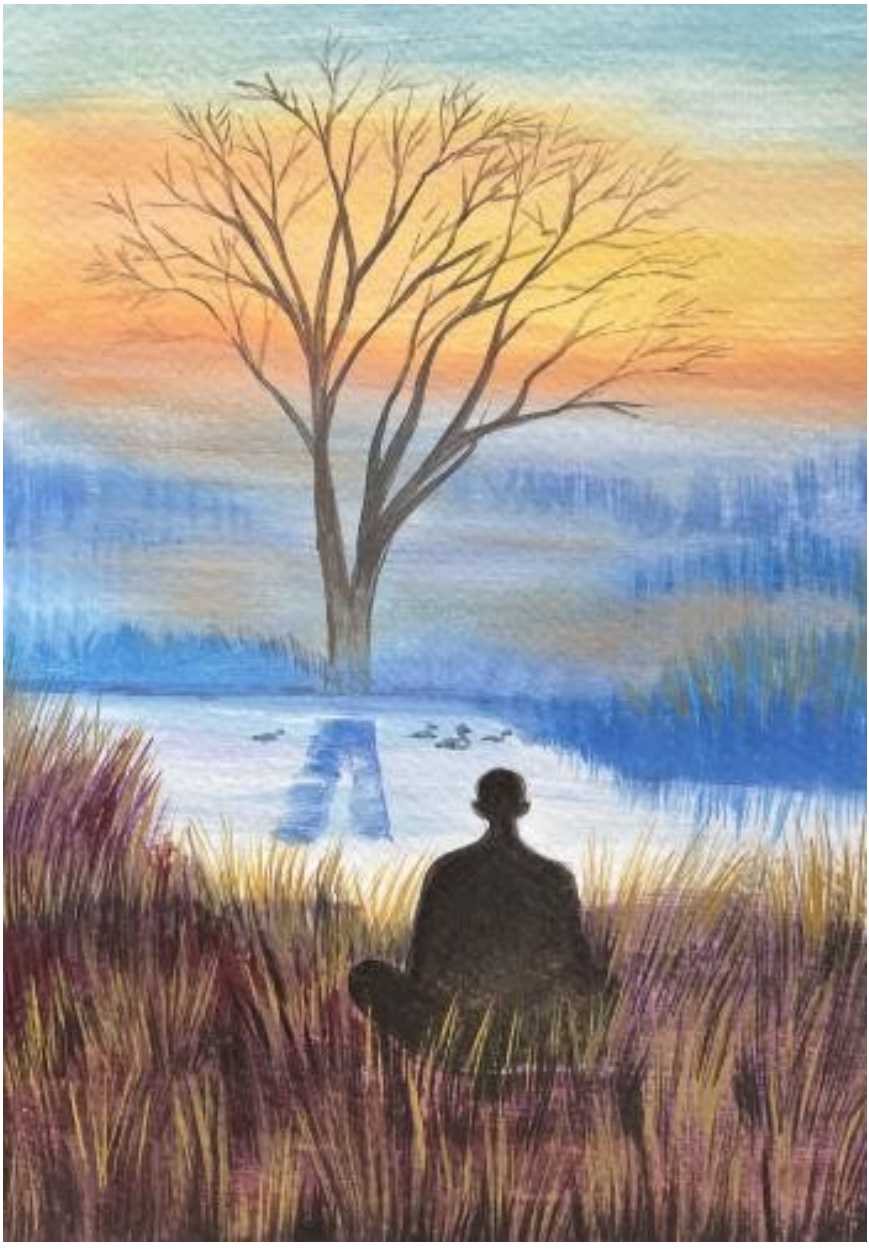
Maybe there were monitors at the nursing station which tipped them off, but a nurse and doctor walked into the room. The doctor put her hands on the patient's shoulder. Pete took a few more breaths before the doctor checked his vitals and called time of death.

When I first sat down, I was worried about being prepared with the right soundtrack and whether I was a good observer and reporter for medical staff, then I noticed this preoccupation fade away.

I can't say that my presence in the room or hearing a favorite song made a difference to him, but you just never know. I stopped thinking about myself. I was grateful for the experience.

Letting someone know they're not alone is no small thing.

Deborah Hawkins is a writer, a workshop facilitator, and a researcher.



Shape Of Silence

Kent Nerburn

The silence is profound this morning. It is not portentous; there seems to be nothing in the waiting. It is a gentle silence, liquid and pastel, a shimmer on still waters.

It is good to listen to the silence that surrounds each day. In the same way that music is made alive by the silence that surrounds the notes, a day comes alive by the silence that surrounds our actions. And the dawn is the time when silence reveals herself most clearly.

I once met a man who was raised on the Canadian prairies. We got to talking about the open space, and how it had shaped his spirit. "When the wind stops," he said, "it is so loud that everyone pauses to listen."

The thought intrigued me. How could the end of a sound be loud?

But when I traveled to those prairies, I began to understand. For the people in the great prairies, the sound they hear, the music that underlies their lives, is the constant and ever-present howl of the wind. To them it is no sound at all. When it is removed, the silence takes a different shape, and all are aware of it; all pause to hear.

We need to pay heed to the many silences in our lives. An empty room is alive with a different silence than a room where someone is hiding. The silence of a happy house echoes less darkly than the silence of a house of brooding anger. The silence of a winter morning is sharper than the silence of a summer dawn. The silence of a mountain pass is larger than the silence of a forest glen.

These are not fantasies, they are subtle discriminations of the senses. Though all are the absence of sound, each silence has a character of its own.

No meditation better clears the mind than to listen to the shape of the silence that surrounds us. It focuses us on the thin line between what is there and what is not there. It opens our heart to the unseen, and reminds us that the world is larger than the events that fill our days.

Into this morning's silence comes the first call of a bird. I listen carefully. It cuts through the silence like a rainbow through the dawn.

Kent Nerburn is an author of numerous books.
Excerpt above from Small Graces.

~ ~

End Of The World

Dougald Hine

The end of the world as we know it is not the end of the world ... it is also the end of a way of knowing the world. "When a world ends, its systems and stories come apart, even the largest of them: the stories that promised to explain everything, the systems that organized all that could be said to be real. It's not that those stories had no truth in them; it's not that there was no reality in the description of the world those systems offered. It's that they couldn't hold. The things they valued betrayed them; the things they left out came back to haunt them."

'In these times, all we can do is be a sign,' a father tells his daughter in Ben Okri's novel *The Freedom Artist*. 'We have to help to bring about the end of the world.' We must do this, he goes on, so that a new beginning can come. 'But first there must be an end.'

Many kinds of end are possible. My friend Vanessa Oliveira wrote a book ... in which the focus is not on saving modernity, or bringing it down, or rushing to build what comes afterwards, but doing what we can to give it a good ending. To let it hand on its gifts and teach the lessons that may only become apparent as the end approaches. This must be accompanied by the work of midwifery: assisting with the birth of something new, unfamiliar and possibly (but not necessarily) wiser, and avoiding suffocating this new world with our projections. The philosopher Federico Campagna speaks about living at the end of a world. In such a time, he suggests, the work is no longer to concern ourselves with making sense according to the logic of the world that is ending, but to leave good ruins, clues and starting points for those who come after, that they may use in building a world that is -- as Vanessa would say -- 'presently unimaginable'.

I don't write to announce the end of the world or to change the minds of those who are convinced that the world as we have known it can be saved or made sustainable. I write for anyone who has found themselves, as I have, needing to make sense of what is ending, how we can talk about it and what tasks are worth taking on in whatever time it turns out that we have.

Something is coming over the horizon: a humbling from which none of us will be spared, that will not be managed or controlled, but will leave us changed.

Before it is over, I suspect, we will need to learn again what it means to take seriously things that are larger or smaller than were allowed to be real or significant, according to the scales and systems of modernity. We will need to dance again with the rhythms of cosmology, to be carried by the kind of stories and images in whose company – as the mythographer Martin Shaw would say – a universe becomes a cosmos. We will need to remember that we are not alone and never were, that we are part of a world of many worlds, only some of which are human. And we will need to

rediscover that any world worth living for centers not on the vast systems we built to secure the future, but on those encounters that are proportioned to the kind of creatures we are, the places where we meet, the acts of friendship and the acts of hospitality in which we offer shelter and kindness to the stranger at the door. In this way, even now, there may be time to find our place within the vastly larger and older story of which we always were a part.

Dougald Hine is the author of At Work, in the Ruins.
Excerpted from "First There Must Be An End,"
Kosmos Journal 2023.

~ ~

Our Practice Is To Close The Gap

Charlotte Joko Beck

Our whole life consists of this little subject looking outside itself for an object. But if you take something that is limited, like body and mind, and look for something outside it, that something becomes an object and must be limited too.

So you have something limited looking for something limited and you just end up with more of the same folly that has made you miserable.

We have all spent many years building up a conditioned view of life. There is "me" and there is this "thing" out there that is either hurting me or pleasing me. We tend to run our whole life trying to avoid all that hurts or displeases us, noticing the objects, people, or situations that we think will give us pain or pleasure, avoiding one and pursuing the other. Without exception, we all do this. We remain separate from our life, looking at it, analyzing it, judging it, seeking to answer the questions, 'What am I going to get out of it? Is it going to give me pleasure or comfort or should I run away from it?" We do this from morning until night.

Underneath our nice, friendly facades there is great unease. If I were to scratch below the surface of anyone I would find fear, pain, and anxiety running amok. We all have ways to cover them up. We overeat, over-drink, overwork; we watch too much television. We are always doing something to cover up our basic existential anxiety. Some people live that way until the day they die.

As the years go by, it gets worse and worse. What might not look so bad when you are twenty-five looks awful by the time you are fifty. We all know people who might as well be dead; they have so contracted into their limited viewpoints that it is as painful for those around them as it is for themselves. The flexibility and joy and flow of life are gone. And that rather grim possibility faces all of us, unless we wake up to the fact that we need to work with our life, we need to practice.

We have to see through the mirage that there is an "I" separate from "that." Our practice is to close the gap. Only in that instant when we and the object become one can we see what our life is.

Enlightenment is not something you achieve. It is the absence of something. All your life you have been going

forward after something, pursuing some goal. Enlightenment is dropping all that. But to talk about it is of little use.
The practice has to be done by each individual. There is no substitute. We can read about it until we are a thousand years old and it won't do a thing for us. We all have to practice, and we have to practice with all of our might for the rest of our lives.

Charlotte Joko Beck was a Zen teacher and the author of the books like Everyday Zen: Love and Work *and* Nothing Special: Living Zen.

The Extraordinary In The Ordinary

Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee

Our acceptance of the ordinary is part of our spiritual maturity and capacity to be of service. It also helps us to avoid the trap of inflation, which can easily catch us when we glimpse a world beyond the ego. It is only too easy to identify with an inner experience. But when we let go of wanting spiritual life to be about us, when we live in the various dimensions without mixing the levels or imposing expectations and desires, this freedom allows us to fully participate in spiritual work.

Present in both the inner and outer world, one learns to serve the world, serve life, serve others without effort. This is a very careful balance. If one takes upon oneself the onerous responsibility of service, then the ego easily gets caught in it; the psyche gets encumbered by it. But being engaged in an ordinary life allows us to be of service without the burden of thinking we can solve the world's or other people's problems, which brings with it self-importance and, worse, spiritual self-importance.

Naqshbandi Sufis have always lived this way, forsaking special robes and working in ordinary jobs, traditionally often as craftsmen – Baha ad-Din Naqshband was a potter, Attar a perfumer. And of course many of the great Zen and Taoist teachers emphasized the ordinary and the dangers of spiritual importance:

Emperor Wu: 'I have built many temples, copied innumerable Sutras and ordained many monks since becoming Emperor. Therefore, I ask you, what is my merit?'

Bodhidharma: 'None whatsoever!'

Emperor Wu: 'Why no merit?'

Bodhidharma: 'Doing things for merit has an impure motive and will only bear the puny fruit of rebirth.'

Emperor Wu, a little put out: 'What then is the most important principle of Buddhism?'

Bodhidharma: 'Vast emptiness. Nothing sacred.'

Emperor Wu, by now bewildered, and not a little indignant: 'Who is this that stands before me?'

Bodhidharma: 'I do not know.'

If we can allow ourselves to live an ordinary life while also staying awake to the great void at the center of all that is, then we can be this intermediary place between that intoxicating, mystical bliss of oblivion and the wonder of how the Divine creates and reveals Itself in all the forms of life. Our lives are the expression of this bridge – ordinary and extraordinary, all things in their place, everything free to be as it is, and our consciousness, our heart, free to be used as needed.

Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee is a Sufi teacher in the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya order.

Being Acted Through

Joanna Macy

Here's a discovery we can make along our ecological Pilgrim's Progress: the discovery of what can happen through us. If we are the rocks dancing, then that which evolved us from those rocks carries us forward now and sustains us in our work for the continuance of life.

When I admired a nurse for her strength and devotion in keeping long hours in the children's ward, she shrugged off my compliment as if it were entirely misplaced. "It's not my strength, you know. I get it from them," she said, nodding at the rows of cots and cribs. "They give me what I need to keep going." Whether tending a garden or cooking in a soup kitchen, there is the sense sometimes of being sustained by something beyond one's own individual power, a sense of being acted "through."

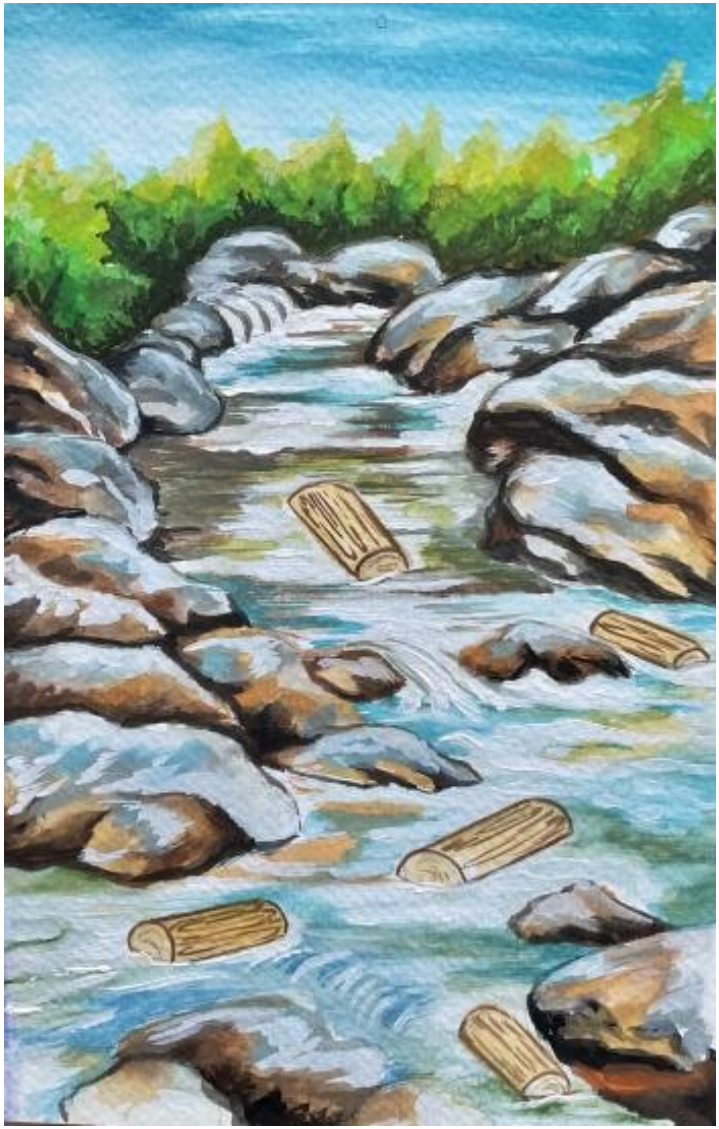
It is close to the religious concept of grace, but distinct from the traditional Western understanding of grace, as it does not require belief in God or a supernatural agency. One simply finds oneself empowered to act on behalf of other beings—or on behalf of the larger whole—and the empowerment itself seems to come "through" that or those for whose sake one acts. This phenomenon, when approached from the perspective of ecology, can be understood as synergy. This is an important point because it leads us to reconceptualize our very notion of what power is.

From the ecological perspective, all open systems—be they cells or organisms, cedars or swamps—are seen to be self-organizing. They don't require any external or superior agency to regulate them, any more than your liver or your

apple tree needs to be told how to function. In other words, order is implicit in life; it is integral to life processes. This contrasts with the hierarchical worldview our culture held for centuries, where mind is set above nature and where order is assumed to be something imposed from above on otherwise random, material stuff. We have tended to define power in the same way, seeing it as imposed from above. So we have equated power with domination, with one thing exerting its will over another. It becomes a zero-sum, or win-lose, game, where to be powerful means to resist the demands or influences of another, and strong defenses are necessary to maintain one's advantage.

In falling into this way of thinking, we lost sight of the fact that this is not the way nature works. Living systems evolve in complexity, flexibility, and intelligence through interaction with each other. These interactions require openness and vulnerability in order to process the flow-through of energy and information. They bring into play new responses and new possibilities not previously present, increasing the capacity to effect change. This interdependent release of fresh potential is called synergy. It is like grace, because it brings an increase of power beyond one's own capacity as a separate entity.

Joanna Macy is an author and spiritual teacher.
Excerpt above from her book World as Lover, World as Self.



Don't Waste A Curse On The Universe

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Don't look for the flaws as you go through life;
And even when you find them,
It is wise and kind to be somewhat blind
And look for the virtue behind them.
For the cloudiest night has a hint of light
Somewhere in its shadows hiding;
It is better by far to hunt for a star,
Than the spots on the sun abiding.

The current of life runs ever away
To the bosom of God's great ocean.
Don't set your force 'gainst the river's course
And think to alter its motion.
Don't waste a curse on the universe--
Remember it lived before you.
Don't butt at the storm with your puny form,
But bend and let it go o'er you.

The world will never adjust itself
To suit your whims to the letter.
Some things must go wrong your whole life long,
And the sooner you know it the better.
It is folly to fight with the Infinite,
And go under at last in the wrestle;
The wiser man shapes into God's plan
As water shapes into a vessel.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1850-1919) was an American author and poet. Her works include Solitude*, which contains the famous line "Laugh, and the world laughs with you; weep, and you weep alone."*

You Gotta Wobble Before You Stand

Roger S. Keyes

Hokusai says look carefully.
He says pay attention, notice.
He says keep looking, stay curious.
He says there is no end to seeing.
He says look forward to getting old.
He says keep changing,
you just get more who you really are.
He says get stuck, accept it,
repeat yourself as long as it is interesting.

He says keep doing what you love.
He says keep praying.

He says everyone of us is a child,
everyone of us is ancient,
everyone of us has a body.
He says everyone of us is frightened.
He says everyone of us
has to find a way to live with fear.

He says everything is alive–
shells, buildings, people, fish,
mountains, trees, wood is alive.
Water is alive.

Everything has its own life.
Everything lives inside us.
He says live with the world inside you.

He says it doesn't matter if you draw,
or write books. It doesn't matter

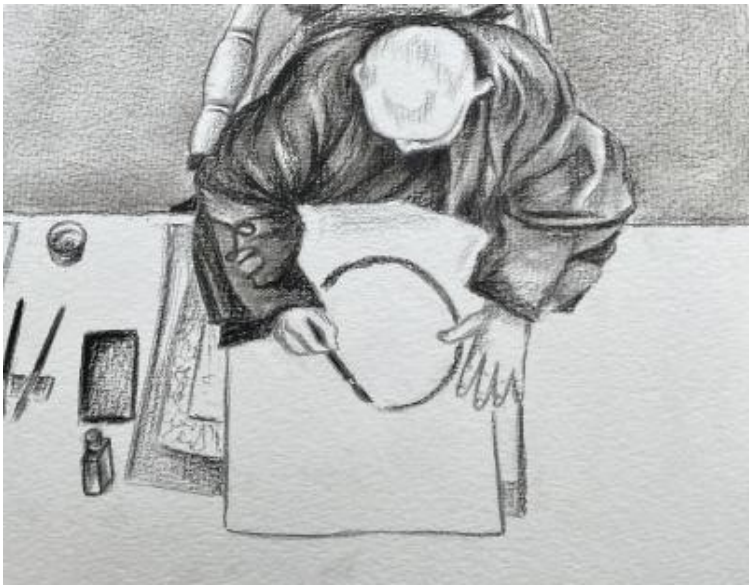
if you saw wood, or catch fish.
It doesn't matter if you sit at home
and stare at the ants on your veranda
or the shadows of the trees
and grasses in your garden.

It matters that you care.
It matters that you feel.
It matters that you notice.
It matters that life lives through you.

Contentment is life living through you.
Joy is life living through you.
Satisfaction and strength
is life living through you.
Peace is life living through you.

He says don't be afraid.
Don't be afraid.
Look, feel, let life take you by the hand.
Let life live through you.

Roger Keyes was a highly respected scholar
of Japanese print who studied the works of
Katsushika Hokusai -- a Japanese artist,
ukiyo-e painter and printmaker
of the Edo period in Japan (mid 1800s)
who practiced single-pointed attention,
perseverance, exploration through his art.
Keyes brings out the spiritual voice
of Hokusai through this poem.



Interbeing

Thich Nhat Hanh

Emptiness does not mean nothingness. Saying that we are empty does not mean that we do not exist. No matter if something is full or empty, that thing clearly needs to be there in the first place. When we say a cup is empty, the cup must be there in order to be empty. When we say that we are empty, it means that we must be there in order to be empty of a permanent, separate self.

About thirty years ago I was looking for an English word to describe our deep interconnection with everything else. I liked the word "togetherness," but I finally came up with the word "interbeing." The verb "to be" can be misleading, because we cannot be by ourselves, alone. "To be" is always to "inter-be." If we combine the prefix "inter" with the verb "to be," we have a new verb, "inter-be." To inter-be and the action of interbeing reflects reality more accurately. We inter-are with one another and with all life.

There is a biologist named Lewis Thomas, whose work I appreciate very much. He describes how our human

bodies are “shared, rented, and occupied” by countless other tiny organisms, without whom we couldn’t “move a muscle, drum a finger, or think a thought.” Our body is a community, and the trillions of non-human cells in our body are even more numerous than the human cells. Without them, we could not be here in this moment. Without them, we wouldn’t be able to think, to feel, or to speak. There are, he says, no solitary beings. The whole planet is one giant, living, breathing cell, with all its working parts linked in symbiosis.

We can observe emptiness and interbeing everywhere in our daily life. [...] Looking into the child, we can be in touch with her parents and ancestors, but equally, looking into the parent, we can see the child. We do not exist independently. We inter-are.

Everything relies on everything else in the cosmos in order to manifest—whether a star, a cloud, a flower, a tree, or you and me.

Every time I offer incense or prostrate before the altar in my hermitage, I do not do this as an individual self but as a whole lineage. Whenever I walk, sit, eat, or practice calligraphy, I do so with the awareness that all my ancestors are within me in that moment. I am their continuation. Whatever I am doing, the energy of mindfulness enables me to do it as “us,” through interbeing, not as “me.” When I hold a calligraphy brush, I know I cannot remove my father from my hand. I know I cannot remove my mother or my ancestors from me. They are present in all my cells, in my gestures, in my capacity to draw a beautiful circle. Nor can I remove my spiritual teachers from my hand. They are there in the peace, concentration, and mindfulness I enjoy as I make the circle. We are all drawing the circle together.

Thich Nhat Hanh *was a Vietnamese Buddhist Zen master, poet, scholar, and peace activist who was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.*
Excerpted from The Art of Living.

A Turtle's Silver Bead Of Quietude

Gayle Boss

The day is bright and warm for December, but the logs in the marsh pond are bare. Spring to summer into early fall they served, on sunny days, as spa to a dozen or so painted turtles. I would see them basking, splay-legged, stretching

their leathery necks out full length, avid for every luscious atom of sunlight and sun-warmth.

Out of sight now, they've not escaped the harsher cold that's coming.

The water is maybe waist-deep in this pond, but a murky soup, clogged with roots and plants. One day in the fall, as water and air cooled, at some precise temperature an ancient bell sounded in the turtle brain. A signal: *Take a deep breath*. Each creature slipped off her log and swam for the warmer muck bottom. Stroking her way through the woven walls of plant stems, she found her bottom place. She closed her eyes and dug into the mud. She buried herself.

And then, pulled into her shell, encased in darkness, she settled into a deep stillness. Her heart slowed -- and slowed -- almost to stopping. Her body temperature dropped -- and stopped just short of freezing. Now, beneath a layer of mud, beneath the weight of frigid water and its skin of ice and skim of snow, everything in her has gone so still she doesn't need to breathe. And anyway, the iced-over pond will soon be empty of oxygen. Sunk in its bottom-mud, for six months she will not draw air into her lungs. To survive a cold that would kill her, or slow her so that predators would kill her, she slows herself beyond breath in a place where breath is not possible.

And waits. As ice locks in the marsh water and howling squalls batter its reeds and brush, beneath it all she waits. It is her one work, and it is not easy. Oxygen depletion stresses every particle of her. Lactic acid pools in her bloodstream. Her muscles begin to burn—her heart muscle, too, a deadly sign. That acid has to be neutralized, and calcium is the element to do it. Out of her bones, then out of her shell, her body pulls calcium, slowly dissolving her structure, her shape, her strength. But to move to escape -- requiring breath -- in a place where there is no oxygen -- that would suffocate her. So, though she is dissolving, every stressed particle of her stays focused on the silver bead of utter quietude.

It's this radical simplicity that will save her. And deep within it, at the heart of her stillness, something she has no need to name, but something we might call trust: that one day, yes, the world will warm again, and with it, her life.

Gayle Boss is an author who shines light
on the human-animal bond. She writes,
"I've found it true, what the thirteenth-century
mystic Meister Eckhart said:
'God is equally near in all creatures.'"

~ ~

The Grand Predicament

Nic Askew

A fear of not belonging drives much of what we do and how we are.

Unknowingly it can define the experience of a life.

Most of us live with an underlying sense that we are not yet enough.

And assume that until we are we cannot truly belong.

We assume that we must become a better version of ourself.

But we're never quite enough in this relentless pursuit of belonging.

We are lost to a never ending self improvement.

Might we have been looking out there when all along it had been within?

Might we already be the version we'd been seeking?

Beyond the endless game of fixing what is seemingly broken there exists a profound experience of knowing that there is no one to fix.

That we are enough as we are. And that we belong without condition.

Yet we cannot seek and hope to find this. As its nature is to find us. And to consume us with no doubt.

No one can teach us this. We cannot learn this.

In a moment of surrender. In a moment of not seeking, the experience can be re-known.

Nothing changes but everything is somehow different.

And then everything begins its transformation.

Liberation, peace and all that follows is the work of Inner View.

Nic Askew is a filmmaker.

Integrity Is A Quality Of Being

Pierre Pradervand

Integrity is a quality of being. It means holding on at all times to your highest sense of truth and your own vision, whatever the cost may be. It consists in resonating with the most intimate fiber of your being and enjoins us not to withdraw one inch, whatever the prestige or authority of the person or institution opposing us—not out of obstinacy but because of the quiet courage of an inner voice that says: "This above all: to thine own self be true."

Integrity means following at all times one's highest sense of what is right, whatever the consequences may be, however solitary your path, and however loud the taunts and the mockeries of the crowd and the Pharisees.

Following your integrity means "speaking truth to power," as the Quaker wisdom goes, even when silence would better serve your interests. It means hanging on to

truth when all those surrounding accept compromises or pretend that it's not really important. It means being unflinching and firm when others disappear in the underground shelters of their fears and timidity.

Integrity means refusing to dilute one's inner sense of truthfulness, be it to satisfy, appease, or gain the approval of one's beloved.

Above all, integrity means refusing to cheat yourself, lie to yourself, or abide in the shade of half truths. You can lie to others—even deceive them—and be forgiven. But when you lie to yourself, who is there to forgive you? After a defeat of this sort, who will help you get up again? Even if you are sufficiently ignorant to let yourself indulge in the supreme absurdity of deceiving yourself, will not your inner strength abandon the ship of he who voluntarily scuttles it in that manner? In such moments, grace alone can save you.

To deceive oneself kills the discernment that is the basis of honest judgments and meaningful choices. To consciously avoid what one knows to be true or to lie to oneself is the sin against the spirit, which resides deep down in each one of us.

Integrity, as the most intimate substance of our being, constitutes the marrow of our identity and the foundation of all our qualities, starting with love. It is the woof on which we weave the exquisite textures of our existence, creating a tapestry. No woof, no tapestry. When integrity is married to love in a joyful dance, it forms the perfect couple, and our existence becomes a celebration of life.

So, when winds and tempests howl or when a tempter whispers that "a compromise is absolutely essential" and attempts to make us avoid the challenges we need to grow and stay awake, let us at all costs hold on firmly to that inner foundation, our integrity—for in it resides true life.

Pierre Pradervand is an author and spiritual mentor to many. Excerpt above from his upcoming book, Gentle Art of Discernment.

I Have What You Need

Sharon Salzberg

In the old city section of Jerusalem, there is a wonderful open-stall marketplace. It is a place teeming with life—a deluge of sights and sounds and goods for sale. When I was teaching in Israel once, some friends and I went there. As we were walking down an alleyway, one of the merchants called out to me, "I have what you need!" I felt a thrill go through my entire body. "Wow, he has what I need." I stopped, turned around, and starting walking toward him. Then I thought, "Wait a minute. First of all, I don't need anything, and second, how would he know he has what I need?"

In many ways the world is calling out to us all of the time: "I have what you need! I have what you need!" In

response, we internalize those voices into: "I need. I need something. I'm in a state of deficit, of deprivation." It's as though we turn into some sort of cartoon figure, with our eyes popping out of our heads like they are on springs. "Where is it? Where is this thing I need?" Our arms extend, reaching out. The fingers flex, trying to grab and hold on to one object or another. Our heads rigidly fix in the direction of the object of desire, so as not to lose sight of it. Our bodies incline forward in anticipation. What an uncomfortable mess!

And yet we reach out time and time again, believing the voices. This movement, this constant reaching out, is felt as stress in the body and in the mind. "I have what you need," the voice tells us. "You don't have what you need. I have what you need." But what is it that we really need?

It is true that all beings want to be happy. We want to feel at home in our own lives. We want to feel a part of something greater than our limited sense of who we are. We need an internal feeling of abundance, to be able to give to others. We need the fulfilling knowledge of our connection to all that lives, in order to love others. But in our habit of reaching out to satisfy our needs, we miss where our deepest satisfaction lies. A Tibetan text puts it like this: "Beneath the pauper's house there are inexhaustible treasures, but the pauper never realizes this, and the treasures never say, 'I am here.' Likewise, the treasure of our original nature, which is naturally pure, is trapped in ordinary mind, and beings suffer in poverty."

All of those voices lead us away from knowing that we already have what we need. When we practice meditation, we discover the treasure of our original nature. We learn to let go of that cacophony of voices shouting at us about our seeming poverty. We learn not to get caught in trying to reach out and grasp after things we never really needed to begin with.

When we practice meditation, we see that we can put down the burdens we have carried for so long. The poet Rumi says: "How long will we fill our pockets like children

with dirt and stones? Let the world go. Holding it, we never know ourselves, never are airborne." When we practice meditation, we let go. We let go of our addictions to certain objects and experiences, let go of believing in those voices that call to us. We let go of our limited concepts of happiness and of who we are and what we need. Discovering the treasure of our original nature, we can be airborne. We can be free.

Sharon Salzberg is renowned meditation teacher. Excerpt above from her book, A Heart As Wide as the World.

~ ~

Presence Of Things Beyond Flesh

Drew Lanham

Lecturing has always come easily to me. Backed by the technical, the theoretical, a few supporting slides, and a

captive audience of college students or peers, I've given hundreds of presentations in classrooms and professional meetings. But after many years of stale introductions, methods, results, and conclusions, I began to wonder if anyone was listening -- and if there was real reason for them to.

In lecture after lecture I regurgitated factoids and data that were readily available in the readings. And between the slides of animals on the verge of extinction and of tropical rainforests being slashed, burned, and mowed down by cattle, I sounded to my own ears like the apocalyptic preachers. I looked into my audience and saw drawn expressions of boredom and dread. Day after day, semester after semester, year after year, I droned on. Yes, I was presenting the facts. Yes, I was publishing the facts. But it seemed to me that the facts never created motivation to make things better. [...]

A few years later, I spent several springs in northern Vermont, writing and thinking about nature in a different way. In that strange place my right brain flickered back on. The need to impress other professors, pile up peer-reviewed publications, and cache grant dollars began to give way to a desire for consciousness. Vermont was the greenest place I'd ever been. It was also a place where no one knew me. In that freedom my stress-tightened shoulders dropped and the tension in my jaw lessened. I slowed down and walked dirt roads -- sometimes barefoot and empty minded, with not much more in my head than the present moment. Warbling vireos and least flycatchers were the only audiences I entertained.

Within the past couple of years I've given fewer and fewer (statistics-driven) presentations. More and more I find myself taking the hard data and wrapping it in genuine caring. The words are flocks of inspiration that I want to migrate from my mouth into the heads and hearts of others. I shake hands less now and give hugs more. I exchange more heartbeats than business cards. The energy is palpable.

In my moments of confession in front of strangers, talking about my love of something much greater than any one of us, I become a freer me. Each time I am reborn. For all those years of running from anything resembling religion and all the scientific training that tells me to doubt anything outside of the prescribed (statistical) limits, I find myself defined these days more by what I cannot see than by what I can. As I wander into the predawn dark of an autumn wood, I feel the presence of things beyond flesh, bone, and blood. My being expands to fit the limitlessness of the wild world. My senses flush to full and my heartbeat quickens with the knowledge that I am not alone.

The ornithologist Drew Lanham is lyrical
in the languages of science, humans, and birds.
Excerpt above from his celebrated book,
The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's
Love Affair with Nature.

Being Nice Isn't The Same As Being Kind

Donna Cameron

Kind people go beyond what's expected of them. They go beyond the easy response to offer the best of who they are. They do it without expectation of something in return. They do it because of who and what they are and their vision of the world they want to live in.

Most people would tell you I am a nice person. I was raised to be nice. "Be nice" was my mother's frequent mantra. [...] My mother, while generally nice, was not especially kind. Nice allowed her to keep her distance from most people and avoid connecting or interacting at more than a superficial level. She was almost always civil, but effort and warmth were generally absent for all but the closest

friends or relatives, and sometimes even then her kindness was restrained. A string of losses from early childhood on had taught her not to trust or hope for too much, or to set her sights too high. She lived with a deep regard for safety and a persistent fear of more loss. With my mother as my model, I learned to be cautious, reserved, and nice.

But some years ago, I realized that wasn't enough. I wanted to be more than nice. I wanted to abandon lingering fears and set my sights high. I wanted to be kind. There's just something about kind people. By their actions, or sometimes by their mere presence, they make us feel good. They give us hope for the world. To me, being kind meant knowing at the end of each day that I had helped, that I was offering the best of who I am, and that I had perhaps made a difference. And it also meant spending less time looking for threats or failings and more time recognizing abundance and compassion. I saw that my life would matter if, at its end, people said of me, "She was a kind person." I could think of no greater eulogy. So I aspired to be kind, and frequently I was. But just as often, I was impatient, I was snarky, I was judgmental, I was indifferent or simply oblivious.

Being kind—truly kind—is hard. Nice requires little effort. I can be nice while also being indifferent, critical, and even sarcastic. But I can't be kind and be any of those things. Being kind means caring. It means making an effort. It means thinking about the impact I'm having in an interaction with someone and endeavoring to make it rich and meaningful—giving them what they need at that exact moment, without worrying about whether I get anything in return. It means letting go of my judgments and accepting people as they are. Kindness requires me to do something my upbringing discouraged—it demands that I reach out and that I take a risk.

Nice doesn't ask too much of us. It isn't all that hard to be nice; in fact, it's easy. It's also benign. Passive. Safe. One can be nice without expending too much energy or investing too much of oneself in others. One can be nice without taking

risks. Nice is holding the door, smiling at the cashier; nice may even be dropping a couple of dollars in a homeless person's hand if we do so without looking him in the eye and saying a genuinely caring word. Kind is asking how we can help, offering our hand, jumping in without being asked, and engaging in conversation that goes beyond the superficial. All of these actions have an element of risk: we might be rebuffed, ignored, or disrespected.

Years ago, I had the pleasure of knowing Dr. Dale Turner, author, speaker, theologian, and extraordinarily kind man. He always carried with him and handed out little green cards with two simple words printed on them: "Extend Yourself." I've carried that little card in my wallet and had those two words pinned beside my desk for nearly three decades. It seems to me that the phrase "Extend Yourself' captures the essence of kindness. It also highlights the difference between niceness and kindness.

A life of kindness is not something that I live only when it suits me. I'm not a kind person if I'm kind only when it's easy or convenient. A life of kindness means being kind when it's neither convenient nor easy—in fact, sometimes it might be terribly hard and tremendously inconvenient. That's when it matters most. That's when the need is greatest and transformation dances at the edge of possibility. That's the time to take a deep breath and invite kindness to dance.

After many deeply-satisfying years in non-profit management, Donna Cameron spends her time "pursuing unanswerable questions in good company (Rachel Remen)." Excerpt above from her book, A Year of Living Kindly.

The Cauldron Of Time

James O'dea

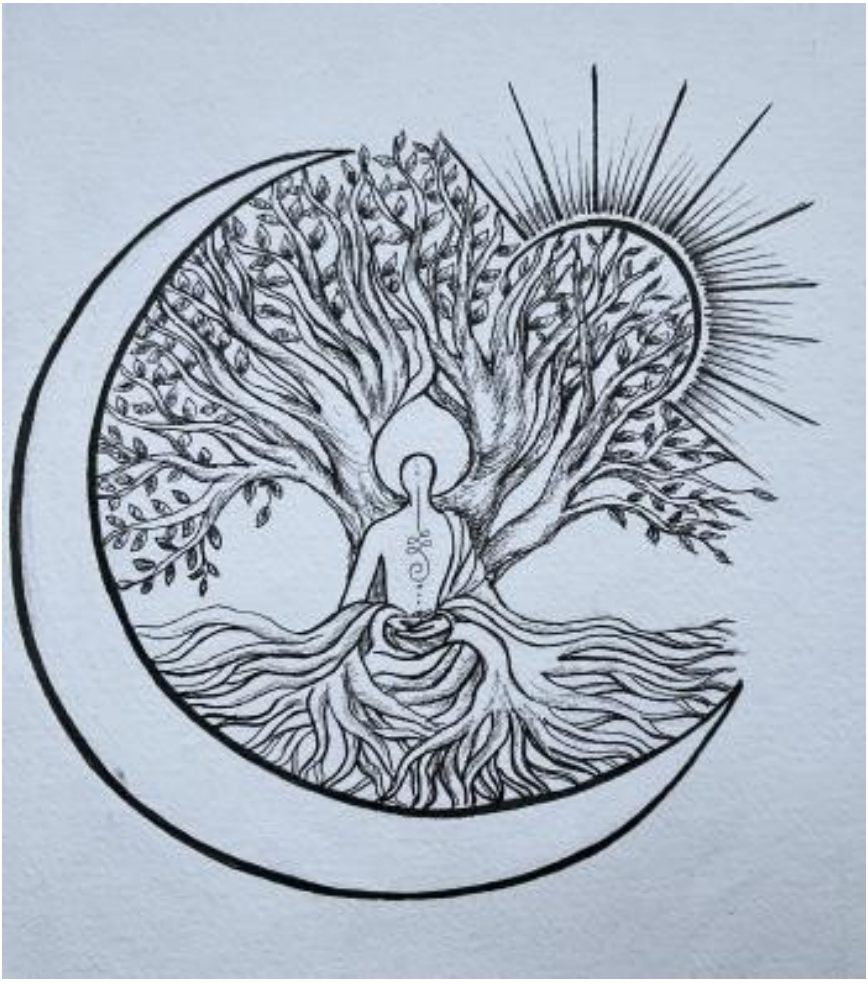
We who live and breathe in a body
see the Creator’s signature as living gold:
the gold of a magnificent sunlight splashed on the active rivers
of our hearts’ generosity, pouring molten love into the world,
glowing in our greatest stories
signaling beauty
celebrating the courage to go outside and be
more than reflections, instead to be living flames of gold
burning in existence as naked human God sparks.

But gold is not the goal as some profess
it is the gate through which we pass into
the new life, into the greening of our spirit
into an aliveness vitalized in worlds unseen by the material eye,
the green soul force growing in vibrant concentrations of consciousness
where perception begins to merge with Source
and with all the incorruptible energies of Life Eternal.
Up to this point all is energy, energized by the green waves
of the heart's subtle compassion.

But still there is an invitation beyond the gold of inspiration
and the green of illumination,
an invitation that seems to seep out of a velvet darkness
a lake of nothingness
an invitation to no space, no time,
no movement, no thought
no accomplishments, no accolades,
no echoes of the world
gone, gone, all gone
nothing left but the empty well of original bliss.

Only those who enter this dark night
can look up and see the hidden face of God
where Nothing and Everything are one.

James O'dea is an author of several books,
former President of IONS and Washington
Director of Amnesty International.



Reclaim Your Chicken

Jon Bernie

Being does not require thought. Be fully attentive, gently attentive. Trust the natural ease of awareness. Make no effort. No trying, no doing, no defensiveness. Just gazing and seeing without resistance.

As you allow this natural openness, at some point it begins to gel. The Jell-O of awareness! One minute it's liquid, the next minute — bloop! It's kind of a little jiggly, but there it is: connectedness. When you're tuned in like that, there's empathy. There's no "your feelings" or "my feelings," just the movement of sensation.

This is what it means to understand profoundly—not personally—what responsibility really is: the realization that we are interwoven with everything and everyone.

As we cultivate this attentiveness, interconnectedness of being emerges. With it comes the natural letting go of the burden of always being in survival mode. Unfortunately, as you all know, we live in a world where survival mode is normal. That's the heart of why we are lost, hopeless, helpless, and in despair. We have lost touch with being; our true being.

But it is not lost. You are intimate with it. It is nourishing, loving, generous. Perceiving it fulfills us as human beings.

And so you can live naturally as who you are in the world, more in touch with your individual purpose, your contribution to the ecosystem of all being. You may not be able to articulate it, you may not understand it, but something deep within you completely trusts that movement is guiding you and guiding everything all of the time, because now you're in sync with it.

Awakening is being in sync.

Years ago, I used to say I was into the Teachings of the Chicken.

You've heard the expression, "you're like a chicken running around with your head cut off." Remember that? Well, I changed it to, "you're a head running around with your chicken cut off."

You have to reclaim your chicken!

There is such wonder in experiencing peace throughout your whole nervous system. Nothing to do, nowhere to go, no one to be. What a relief! Then we really

see. This seeing is also feeling, listening, being, connection. A profound synaesthesia.

At this stage of listening, very little instruction is required. If you're looking for more, notice that urge. Notice that insecurity without trying to fix it. Allow insecurity. What if insecurity—wow—was nothing wrong? This is just a natural rebalancing in process—this is just healing. Healing isn't necessarily getting rid of a condition. It could be. It's also balance, and harmony even with imperfection, and ultimately freedom.

Jon Bernie is a contemporary, nondual spiritual teacher who offers a compassionate, heart-centered approach to awakening.

Welcoming The Stranger

Wakanyi Hoffman

My husband, children, and I have lived in 7 countries for the last decade and a half. We have always been the strangers knocking on new neighbors' doors while simultaneously communing with the strangeness of the

mixed feelings of being the newcomers. Over time, the ability to open up unguarded has become crucial to settling in and feeling at home in different parts of the world. I remember a timely lesson about strangers in 2009 during a move to the Philippines from Nepal. Our oldest was 3 years old. She was accustomed to chatting with strangers in public places such as street markets in the back alleys in Kathmandu. She naturally sauntered up to the hotel staff and introduced herself. She then relayed our entire family story, giving away specific details such as: our mixed nationalities, ages, family size, her little brother's birthday, which country he was born in, and even where the grandparents lived in Kenya and the US. She could have easily given out phone numbers too if she had memorized them!

This was the first time that it occurred to us that our daughter and her then toddler brother could not honestly differentiate between strangers and familiar faces. As far as the little 3-year-old was concerned, everyone she met was a friend. I was uncomfortable with her ease around strangers. Yet, I was also uncomfortable with the idea of teaching her about stranger danger.

So we came up with a compromise. I found a way to teach her to "read" the room inside her heart. I wanted her to learn how to tap into her natural intuition to sense real safety versus real danger. I told her she had to breathe three times (being 3 years old at the time) and when exhaling to pay attention to how fast or slow her heart was beating. Did she feel comfort or discomfort? Could she identify which feeling was strongest and why? Did her surroundings look and feel safe? She could then decide if to pour out her story to an unfamiliar face. I told her she had to know if her heart could create room for the stranger's story in the way she asked a stranger to make room for her.

It dawned on me then that welcoming a brand new person into your life is an art of subscribing to a particular lifestyle aligned with collective values. When we socialize (the art of meeting and inviting strangers into our lives), we

do so to enjoy being with other human beings like ourselves. We look for shared values, similar cultural references, and even similar lived experiences. However, when we overthink or over-profile others, there's a possibility that the driving agenda is to ensure they fit into some story about yourself that you want to project to the world.

Socializing for the sake of pleasing yourself can't be a way of life - the important part of socializing is being alive and open to chance encounters that will breathe new ideas about how to manifest the best version of our collective humanity. It is impossible to know for sure whether opening up to a stranger or to the strangeness within will bring joy or suffering, but with trial and error, we become masters at spotting authenticity -- in ourselves and in others.

Just like a little child, we have to live in such a way that our encounters with all kinds of emotions and people emerge from the authentic life we are living, free of negative judgments- about ourselves and others. Nothing about our inward or outward appearance needs to be tidied up to become acceptable or inviting. Simply being who we already are and accepting the space we occupy in that moment when we encounter that newness is enough to be welcoming to strangers.

Wakanyi Hoffman is an artist of life
who paints the shades of each day
as a storyteller, author, mother, global citizen,
journalist, and keeper of indigenous wisdom.

An Ode To Low Expectations

James Parker

It was 1993. I was sitting over a plate of eggs in the New Piccadilly Café in Soho, London. Things were not going well. As a man, as a person, as a unit of society, I was barely functioning. More acutely, I was having panic attacks, in an era when people didn't yet say "panic attack." They just said Oh, dear. As far as I was concerned, I was going insane.

I took a despairing slurp from my mug, then put it back down. As I did so, the side of my hand touched the Formica tabletop, and I felt the radiant heat from where the mug had been resting a second before. Or, more accurately, I registered it. Through my private cerebral drizzle—the

continuous, joy-canceling brain-rain that was my mental reality at the time—I noted it: energy, life, jiggling molecules, the world. A message from the fire of generosity at the heart of the universe. And the message was this: One day, you'll be able to simply appreciate what's in front of you. The tea, the café, London, the little lens of warmth on the table. One day, this will be enough.

Strive for excellence, by all means. My God, please strive for excellence. Excellence alone will haul us out of the hogwash. But lower the bar, and keep it low, when it comes to your personal attachment to the world. Gratification? Satisfaction? Having your needs met? Fool's gold. If you can get a buzz of animal cheer from the rubbishy sandwich you're eating, the daft movie you're watching, the highly difficult person you're talking to, you're in business. And when trouble comes, you'll be fitter for it.

"Reality is B-plus," says my friend Carlo. I'd probably give it an A-minus, but I take his point. "There lives the dearest freshness deep down things," wrote Gerard Manley Hopkins. But there also lives the dearest shoddiness. We're half-finished down here, always building and collapsing, rigging up this and that, dropped hammers and flapping tarps everywhere. Revise your expectations downward. Extend forgiveness to your idiot friends; extend forgiveness to your idiot self. Make it a practice. Come to rest in actuality.

James Parker is the author of Turned On.

What Exactly Is Love?

J. Krishnamurti

Fear is not love, dependence is not love, jealousy is not love, possessiveness and domination are not love, responsibility and duty are not love, self-pity is not love, the agony of not being loved is not love, love is not the opposite of hate any more than humility is the opposite of vanity. If you can eliminate all these, not by forcing them but by washing them away as the rain washes the dust of many days from a leaf, then perhaps you will come upon this strange flower which man always hungers after.

If you have not got love, not just in little drops but in abundance, if you are not filled with it, the world will go to disaster. You know intellectually that the unity of mankind is essential and that love is the only way, but who is going to teach you how to love? When you exercise discipline and the will to love, love goes out the window. By practicing some method or system of loving you may become extraordinarily clever or more kindly or get into a state of non-violence, but that has nothing whatsoever to do with love.

In this torn desert world there is no love because pleasure and desire play the greatest roles, yet without love your daily life has no meaning. And you cannot have love if there is no beauty. There is beauty only when your heart and mind know what love is. Without love in that sense of beauty there is no virtue, and you know very well that, do what you will, improve society, feed the poor, you will only be creating more mischief, for without love there is only ugliness and poverty in your own heart and minds. But when there is love and beauty, whatever you do is right, whatever you do is in order. If you know how to love, then you can do what you

love, then you can do what you like because it will solve all other problems.

So we reach the point: can the mind come upon love without discipline, without thought, without enforcement, without any book, any teacher or leader- come upon it as one comes upon a lovely sunset? It seems to me that one thing is absolutely necessary and that is passion without motive- passion that is not the result of some commitment or attachment, passion that is not lust. A man who does not know what passion is will never know love because love can come into being only when there is total self abandonment.

A mind that is seeking is not a passionate mind and to come upon love without seeking it is the only way to find it- to come upon it knowingly and not as the result of any effort or experience. Such a love, you will find, is not of time; such a love is both personal and impersonal, is both the one and the many. Like a flower that has perfume you can smell it or pass it by. That flower is for everybody and for the one who takes the trouble to breathe it deeply and look at it with delight. Whether one is very near in the garden or very far away, it is the same to the flower because it is full of that perfume and therefore it is sharing with everybody.

Love is something that is new, fresh, alive. It has no yesterday and no tomorrow. It is beyond the turmoil of thought. It is only the innocent mind which knows what love is, and the innocent mind can live in a world which is not innocent. To find this extraordinary thing which man has sought endlessly through sacrifice, through worship, through relationship [...], through every form of pleasure and pain, is only possible when thought comes to understand itself and comes naturally to an end. Then love has no opposite. Then love has no conflict. If you don't know what to do, you do nothing. Absolutely nothing. Then inwardly you are completely silent. Do you understand what that means? It means that you are not seeking, not wanting, not pursuing; there is no center at all. Then there is love.

Excerpted from scienceandnonduality.com

Look Around In Wonder

David Griswold

Look around in wonder,
Trace the thunderous cloud above
That feeds the river under.
Look above and look below
And look at last within,
You'll see a river running there
And when you do, jump in.

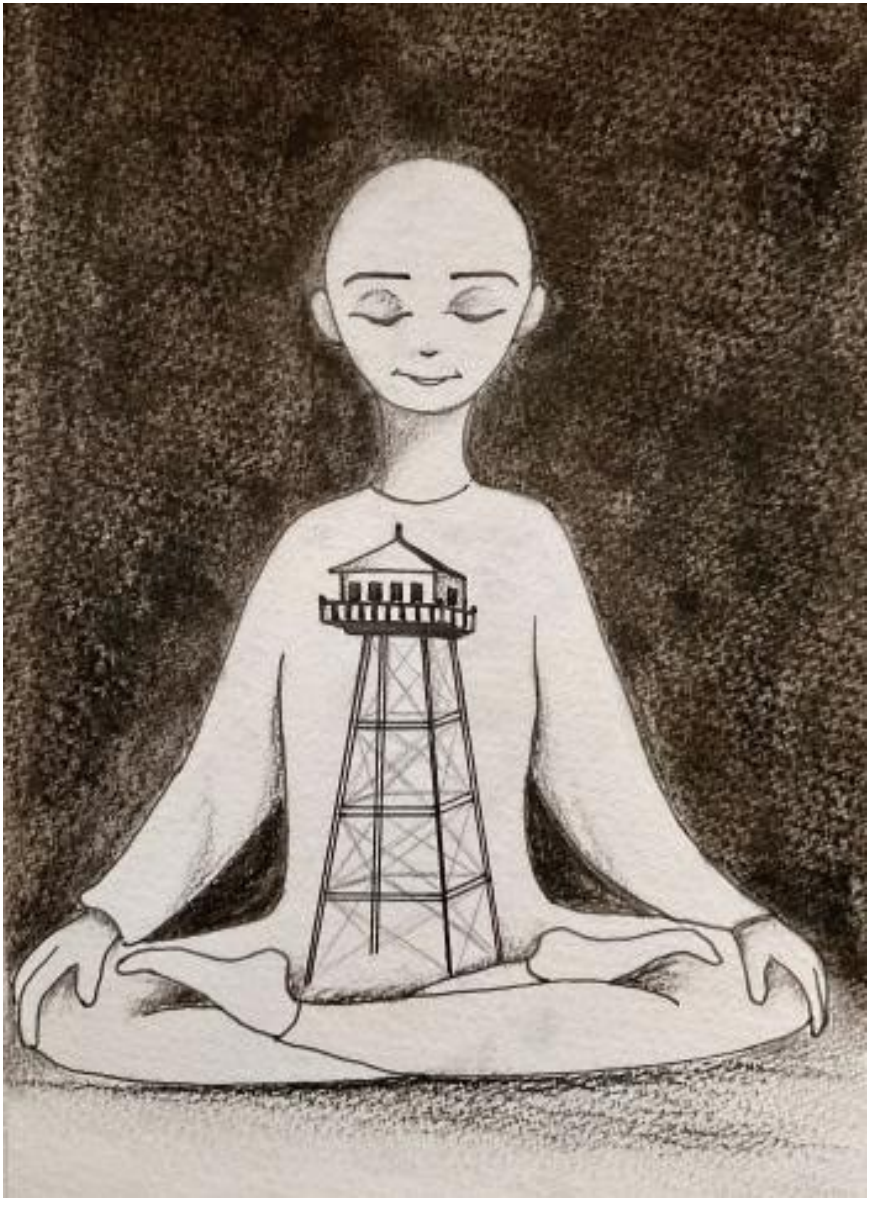
See the seedling sprouting up,
See the tree that bends,
Keep on seeing through the years
How nothing ever ends.
Watch the hawk and watch the cat
And watch the prey they stalk,
Watch the infant reaching out
That slowly learns to walk.

Watch the curling fern unfurl
And watch it curl again,
See the sunlight through the mist
That hangs above the fen.
Watch the moon peek through the leaves,
And see the stars take shape,
Watch the earth go round and round
A sun it can't escape.

Watch your hands and watch your feet
And watch your changing face,
See it in a river's glass
That's never in one place.
Watch the mountains slowly rise
And sink down toward the sea,
Watch your chest both rise and fall
In perfect harmony.

Look around, look around,
Look around in wonder,
Trace the thunderous cloud above
That feeds the river under.
Look above and look below
And look at last within,
You'll see a river running there
And when you do, jump in.

David Griswold is an author, poet, educator, father, and musician. He writes children's poetry in the early hours of morning before his children wake up.



Be Vigilance

Gangaji

Vigilance is often misunderstood. Usually what passes for vigilance is careful monitoring by the superego. I'm sure you're very aware of this kind of monitoring-- "Oh I shouldn't have said it that way. I shouldn't have done it that way. I shouldn't have thought that. I should have surrendered." This monitoring is not vigilance. It is an imitation of vigilance. Vigilance comes from the word vigil, meaning to keep vigil. Keeping vigil is a form of worship. Vigilance is sacred, quiet, peaceful vigil at the flame of truth. (...)

It is a mistaken understanding that implies vigilance to be a burden. The real burden is the denial of your beingness as awareness itself. The idea that vigilance is a burden comes from the concept of spiritual practice. You are admonished to practice. You have to keep your practice. I don't know what the word practice is translated from, but it is a bad translation, because in English practice means some kind of preparation for a real event. You practice for the football game. You practice for your recital. You cannot practice for life. Life is right now. So I don't use the word practice in terms of vigilance. I am talking about being vigilance. Be that now. You are that already. Recognize yourself as that, and be vigilant to your true nature. Then see. Without looking for anything, see. [...]

"Wait and see" doesn't necessarily mean you sit on your couch and never move. It also doesn't necessarily mean that you get off your couch and move. It is much deeper than

that. An active life can be lived as vigilance, and an inactive life can be lived as vigilance. there will be many insights. There will be many revelations and deepening experiences. In the midst of it all, be vigilant to what has not moved, what has always been home, what has always been radiant and unpolluted. There will be even deeper insights. Enjoy them as they come, wave them goodbye as they pass, and be vigilant to what has not moved, what has not been lost by the experience of loss, and what has not been augmented by the experience of gain.

Be vigilance. The deepest joy of the human experience is to be vigilant. It is not a task. It is bliss itself. A bliss that is awake and vigilant to what never moves, to what is always present. Be that. Then you will see this entity called your lifetime unfold exquisitely, as a flower unfolds. As it begins to die, it will die exquisitely, as a flower dies. You don't need to dip it in wax so that it will stay forever at a certain stage.

Excerpted from Freedom and Resolve:
The Living Edge of Surrender. *Gangaji is an American born spiritual teacher and author.*

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Small Kindnesses

Danusha Laméris

I've been thinking about the way, when you walk down a crowded aisle, people pull in their legs to let you by. Or how strangers still say "bless you" when someone sneezes, a leftover from the Bubonic plague. "Don't die," we are saying.

And sometimes, when you spill lemons from your grocery bag, someone else will help you pick them up. Mostly, we don't want to harm each other.

We want to be handed our cup of coffee hot, and to say thank you to the person handing it. To smile at them and for them to smile back. For the waitress to call us honey when she sets down the bowl of clam chowder, and for the driver in the red pick-up truck to let us pass.

We have so little of each other, now. So far from tribe and fire. Only these brief moments of exchange. What if they are the true dwelling of the holy, these fleeting temples we make together when we say, "Here, have my seat," "Go ahead — you first," "I like your hat."

Danusha Laméris is Poet Laureate emeritus of Santa Cruz County, California. Her poem above went viral in the pandemic, and inspired a follow-on collaborative poem by 1300 teenagers from around the world.

Gamble On Humanity

Ayisha Siddiqa

What if the future is soft and revolution is so kind that there is no end to us in sight.

Whole cities breathe and bad luck is bested by a promise to the leaves.

To withstand your own end is difficult.

The future frolics about, promised to no one, as is her right.

Rage against injustice makes the voice grow harsher yet.

If the future leaves without us, the silence that will follow will be an unspeakable nothing.

What if we convince her to stay?

How rare and beautiful it is that we exist.

What if we stun existence one more time?

When I wake up, get out of bed, my seven year old cousin with her ruptured belly tags along.

Then follows my grandmother, aunts, my other cousins
and the violent shape of their drinking water.

The earth remembers everything,
our bodies are the color of the earth and we
are nobodies.

Been born from so many apocalypses, what's one more?

Love is still the only revenge. It grows each time the earth is set on fire.

But for what it's worth, I'd do this again.

Gamble on humanity one hundred times over

Commit to life unto life, as the trees fall and take us with them.
I'd follow love into extinction.

Ayisha Siddiqa is a Pakistani Climate justice advocate living in Coney Island, NY, a coastal area highly prone to hurricanes and floods. She is a co-founder of Polluters Out *and the Executive Director of Student Affairs at FFU. On Sept 20th, 2019 she helped mobilize and lead over 300,000 students onto the streets of Manhattan demanding their governments take climate action.*

How Much Silence Is Too Much?

Gal Beckerman

Ours is a noisy country. We've been rebellious, insolent shouters since the beginning. We invent freak shows and circuses and casinos. Talk too loud. Our public spaces honk and whistle at us. We believe ourselves stars just awaiting a stage. We're a people, Walt Whitman crooned, "singing, with open mouths," our "strong melodious songs."

We chew with open mouths, too — we're without pretense or much regard for personal space. Our latest, greatest gift to the world is a computer for your pocket that chatters at you all day long. And then there's the past two years: political and technological churn, offense and outrage. Noise incarnate.

As much as anyone else, I fantasize about checking out. I would love to remove the pinging notifications from my days, for my mind to wander without being thrown askew by each incoming tweet. But visions of total unplugging also seem a bit grotesque. Even if we can still shut our eyes and cover our ears, become details of the landscape, should we? Is it morally acceptable at this moment? How much silence is too much?

Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk who was among the most influential Catholic thinkers of the 20th century, pondered this question intently. What drew him to the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky was the opportunity for a life of quiet contemplation. His greatest fantasy, he wrote, was "to deliver oneself up, to hand oneself over, entrust oneself completely to the silence of a wide landscape of woods and hills, or sea, or desert; to sit still while the sun comes up over that land and fills its silences with light."

When his popularity as an author made it more difficult to achieve solitude, he retreated even further, living for long stretches by himself in a tool-shed in the hills of the monastery grounds. But the world intruded, particularly in the 1950s and '60s, as the Cold War ramped up and a nuclear standoff seemed imminent. He began to wonder whether the life he had constructed for himself, so sustaining to his soul, justified the disengagement.

Merton did not want to contribute to what he repeatedly called the "noise" of society, but he also knew it wasn't right to ignore his own stake in the world's problems. What he sought instead was a "genuine and deep communication," one achieved, he insisted, only through a continuous recharging in silence. The very element that

might seem to make us bad citizens or antisocial is at the same time a prerequisite for thoughtfulness and more profound connection with others. Since most of us can't yo-yo in and out of solitude (despite the meditation apps that promise to help us do just that), we have to live with this paradox.

Gal Beckerman is an editor at the Book Review.
The excerpt above is from the NYT book review
of How to Disappear: Notes on Invisibility
in Times of Transparency *by Aikiko Busch*

~ ~

How We Wrestle Is Who We Are

Brian Doyle

I remember pacing hospital and house and hills, and thinking that his operations would either work or not and he would either live or die. There was a certain clarity there; I used to crawl into that clarity at night to sleep. But nothing else was clear. I used to think, in those sleepless days and nights, what if they don't fix him all the way and he's a cripple all his life, a pale thin kid in a wheelchair who has Crises? What if his brain gets bent? What if he ends up alive but without his mind at all? What then? Who would he be? Would he always be what he might have been? Would I love him still? What if I couldn't love him? What if he was so damaged that I prayed for him to die? Would those prayers be good or evil?

I don't have anything sweet or wise to say about those thoughts. I can't report that God gave me strength to face my fears, or that my wife's love saved me, or anything cool and poetic like that. I just tell you that I had those thoughts, and they haunt me still. I can't even push them across the page here and have them sit between you and me unattached to either of us, for they are bound to me always, like the dark fibers of my heart. For our hearts are not pure; our hearts are filled with need and greed as much as with love and grace; and we wrestle with our hearts all the time. The wrestling is who we are. How we wrestle is who we are. What we want to be is never what we are. Not yet. Maybe that's why we have these relentless engines in our chests, driving us forward toward what we might be.

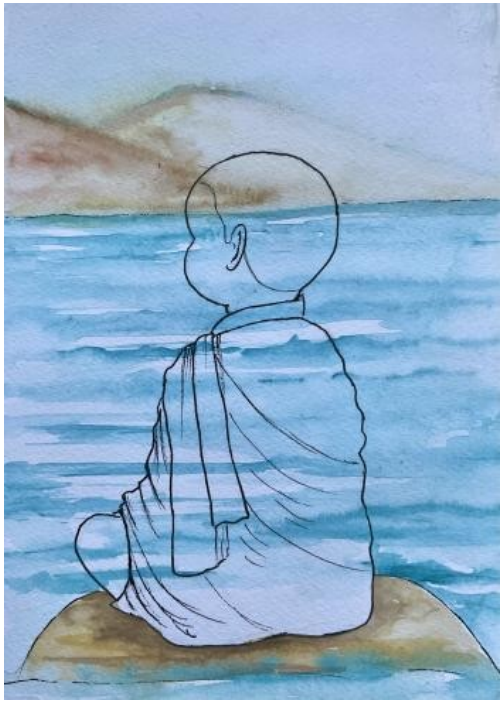
Eventually my son will need a new heart, a transplant when he's thirty or forty or so, though Liam said airily the other day that he's decided to grow a new one from the old

one, which I wouldn't bet against him doing eventually, him being a really remarkable kid. But that made me think: if we could grow new hearts out of old ones, what might we be then? What might we be if we rise and evolve, if we come further down from the brooding trees and out onto the smiling plain, if we unclench the fist and drop the dagger, if we emerge blinking from the fort and the stockade and the prison, if we smash away the steel from around our hearts, if we peel the scales from our eyes, if we do what we say we will do, if we act as if our words really matter, if our words become muscled mercy, if we grow a fifth chamber in our hearts and a seventh and a ninth, and become as if new creatures arisen from our shucked skins, the creatures we are so patently and brilliantly and utterly and wholly and holy capable of becoming…

What then?

Excerpted from
orionmagazine.org/article/how-we-wrestle-is-who-we-are/

~ ~



Appearance As A Gift

Isira

Our whole experience of life is a relationship. Every single moment is centered in the way we relate to what is happening.

To understand this more deeply it helps us to recognize core issues that manifest due to the misperception of separation. Our perceived disconnection from spirit/source is at the root of all our conflicts.

This sense of disconnection underlies EVERY issue we endure as individuals and as a human race. As a result we feel dislocated in ourselves and in life. We have a distorted perception of everything we encounter – which in turn influences our whole experience. Because, simply put – all that we experience is filtered through our perceptions.

These perceptions then lead us to experience what we think. As we experience what we think we make it our belief system. From our belief system, we continue to think and act in ways that shape our entire experience of life.

The first symptom to come out of our (perceived) disconnection with spirit is the belief of separation. This manifests in our ideas and mental constructs of 'other'. We develop an experience of something 'other' than source, soul, eternal life. AND other than everything else we see.

This sense of separation extends beyond a split from source and one's own self, into a sense of separation from every other part of creation. Every person we meet (who really is a part of our infinite Self), is encountered as other. Not only is there a sense of 'other', there is also a sense of

‘opposite’. Our experience is one of duality; me and you, this and that, right and wrong.

Whatever is seen as outside or ‘other’ than our self is seen either as a threat or as desirable. We seek to either reject in order to protect ourselves or to possess in order to feel more complete. Our experience becomes one of dualistic relating -- which ultimately results in a never-ending struggle. [...]

When we see our Self in ‘other’ it is no longer possible to form a relationship based in fear. It is no longer an encounter of competition, protection or an effort to possess. It is a deeply encountered state of relating -- centered in love. It is seen as an expression that is alive and centered only and forever in the now. It is seen as an opportunity to express our authentic Self and to feel and witness our Self as Love through the reflection of what appears as other. This appearance is seen as a gift; a multi-dimensional mirror, to know our infinite Self in and through endless forms.

In essence: the more connected you are in your Self, the more connected your experience will be with life.

Isira is a indigenous wisdom keeper from Australia. As a young adult, Tibetan Lamas, recognising her as an important incarnation, traveled to bring her from Adelaide, South Australia, to the Himalayas to be ordained by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Good Bones, Pushing Water

Carrie Newcomer

We had a small water crisis at our home this week. The break happened within a wall, and so we didn't realize at first that a pipe had begun to leak until morning when my husband noticed water spreading from underneath the bathroom wall baseboard. We quickly pulled out the den couch (which shares the same wall) and after being a little grossed out by how much dust and detritus can accumulate under a piece of furniture that has not been moved in a good while, I started sopping up the water. The break was not huge — at least not yet. I tried using towels and a mop to push back the water, but the leak was becoming a steady flow and this was our indicator, a sign that something deep within

the wall needed our attention. A small leak can become a larger break and eventually do serious structural damage to a house and home. This is when a wise person stops whatever they thought they would be doing that day and shuts down the main water line to begin the messy work of repairing what is damaged or broken. Although we still have quite a bit of dry wall repair and painting to do, the leak has been mended and the water is back on.

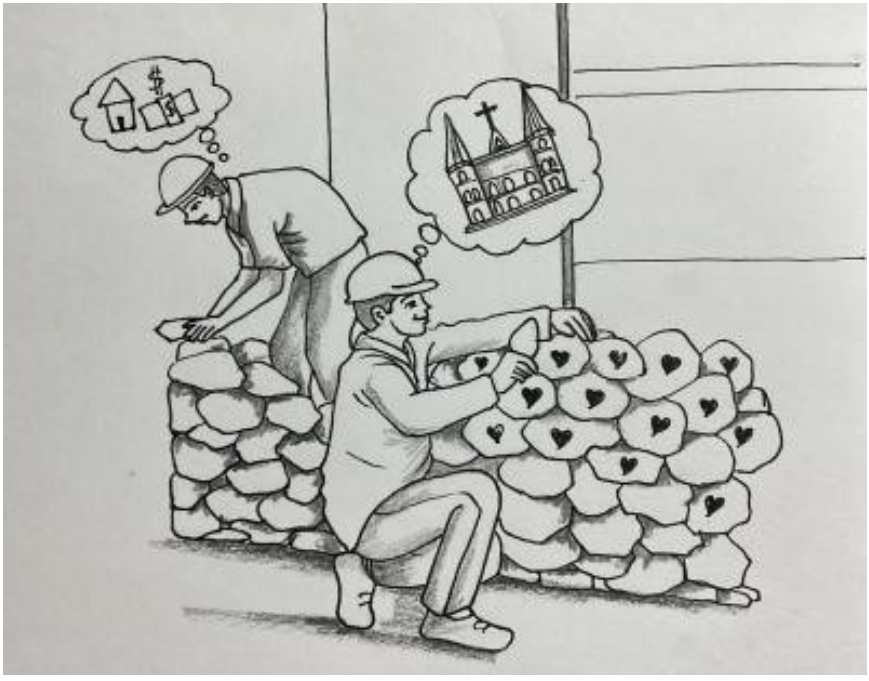
This story is a matter of plumbing, pipes and home repair. But there is a metaphor that came to me during this experience, and I've have been thinking about how many times in my personal life I chose to not notice a slow leak or inner call to attention. I've been thinking about all the times in my life that I tried to push back the water, or the times I did not alter the perpetual motion of my days to address what was seeping under the baseboards. Sometimes my attempt to push back the water looked like overwork (the most revered addiction in our culture) or a selfless form of not taking care of myself (a revered spiritual misconception in our culture). It has also looked like a wide variety of well-honed survival techniques and distractions. But, even though there are plenty of ways to keep trying to push back the water, there comes a time when there is little left to do but open up the wall and start working on the real problem.

Like my house, our essential spirits have "good bones". We are born with with what Thomas Merton called the "True Self", Quakers call "The Inner Light". But then life happens—trauma, tragedy, loss, illness, grief, burdens that arrived as legacy from our ancestors, an unkindness or injustice that echoed for years. All these experiences have put pressure and stress on the good bones of our internal system. It is no wonder that life will brings us moments when we wake up from our sleep and notice water pooling from beneath the baseboards. Granted, sometimes with love and care healing can happen without tearing out entire walls. But there have also been times in my life when I needed to trust my spiritual good bones, tap into trusted inner and outer

resources, and start the messy work of attending to what has been stressed or unduly burdened. The process of new growth and healing is ever present and always possible. I believe that. But working with what's been stressed or harmed can require time and it can be surprisingly messy.

Carrie Newcomer is a Grammy winning folk singer, and a practicing Quaker.

~ ~



Two Stonemasons

Simon Senek

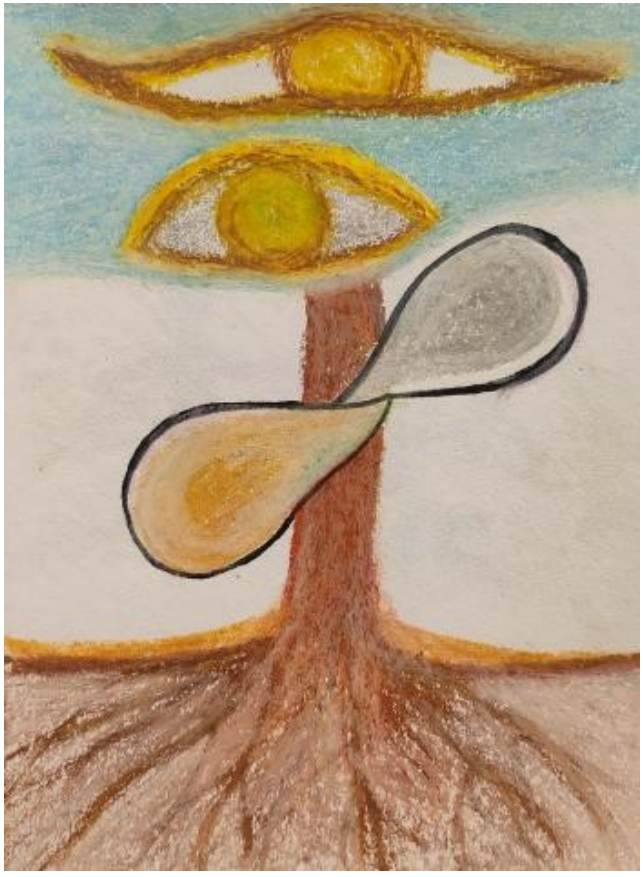
Consider the story of two stonemasons. you walk up to the first stonemason and ask, 'Do you like your job?' He looks up at you and replies, 'I've been building this wall for as long as I can remember. The work is monotonous. I work

in the scorching hot sun all day. The stones are heavy and lifting them day after day can be backbreaking. I'm not even sure if this project will be completed in my lifetime. But it's a job. It pays the bills.' You thank him for his time and walk on.

About thirty feet away, you walk up to a second stonemason. you ask him the same question, 'Do you like your job?' He looks up and replies, 'I love my job. I'm building a cathedral. Sure, I've been working on this wall for as long as I can remember, and yes the work is sometimes monotonous. I work in the scorching hot sun all day. The stones are heavy and lifting them day after day can be backbreaking. I'm not even sure if this project will be completed in my lifetime. But I'm building a cathedral.'

What these two stonemasons are doing is exactly the same; the difference is, one has a sense of purpose. He feels like he belongs. He comes to work to be a part of something bigger than the job he's doing. Simply having a sense of 'WHY?' changes his entire view of the job.

Excerpted from his book, Start with Why.



Hopium

Margaret Wheatley

The problem with hope is that it's bipolar. Every time we rely on hope, we always bring in fear. Wisdom teaches that hope and fear are two sides of the same dynamic. You already know this from your own experience. Think of when you put great hope and effort in a project, cause, or person. You worked very hard for its success, but then it failed from causes beyond your control. How did you feel then?

Too many of us good people dedicated to creating change have become addicted to hope. We feel despair for the destruction of planet, peoples, species, and the future. Yet we still need to make a difference, so we grasp for hope to motivate and energize us.

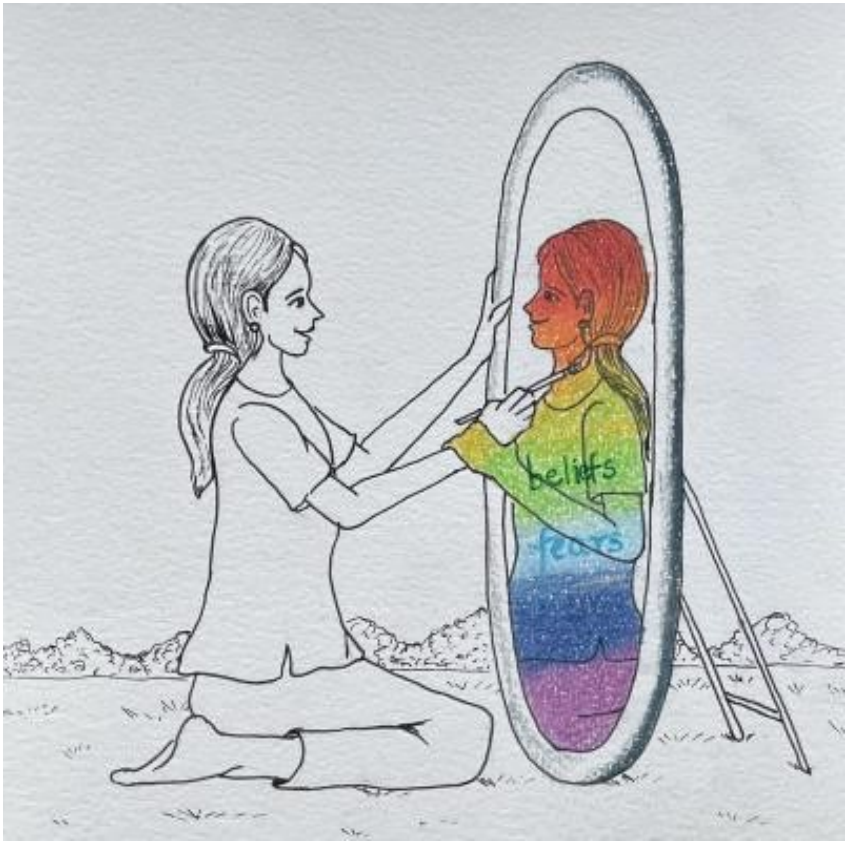
As Holocaust survivor, Hannah Arendt, said, "Hope is a dangerous barrier to acting courageously in dark times. In hope, the soul overleaps reality, as in fear it shrinks back from it."

It's time to be aware of this cycle and liberate ourselves from the drug of Hopium. Hopium never gives us the energy and motivation we need to contribute and persevere. As we free ourselves from the cycle of hope and fear, we don't become useless, hopeless people. Instead, we become people who can see clearly how to contribute in meaningful ways. We discover work that makes a different difference. We contribute meaningfully within our sphere of influence to a person, a community, a local cause.

Those who deeply care about a friend or family member who's addicted will sometimes create an intervention for the person to see their addiction and discover a better way. It's my heartfelt aspiration that we liberate ourselves from Hopium so that we can discover meaningful work to serve the human spirit and the spirit of life.

Hope blinds us to our path of contribution. With insight and compassion, we discover abundant ways to contribute to this time of great suffering for peoples and planet.

Margaret Wheatley is a celebrated author of many books. Excerpt above is from her Medium *article* Freeing Ourselves from the Addiction of Hope.



Meeting Our Own Mortality

Navin Amarasuriya

Stories have helped us make meaning of the world, from ancient times when our ancestors whispered around campfires. Inner mental models that explained the outside world shaped our perceptions, and formed the basis of cohesion from tribes to the greatest civilizations. In these stories lay a natural exclusion, for our stories of creation or broader ideologies, subtly creates a dualistic way of seeing the world, and 'othering' those who live outside of our interpretation.

Creation stories, and the exploration of our mortality is a foundational theme. As Ernest Becker put it, "Man is literally split in two: he has an awareness of his own splendid uniqueness in that he sticks out of nature with a towering majesty, and yet he goes back into the ground a few feet in order to blindly and dumbly rot and disappear forever. It is a terrifying dilemma to be in and to have to live with." In order to make sense of this existential dread, humanity has invented countless stories to comfort us as we conceptually peer over the edge of our mortal precipice.

These tales have the power to bind people together, but equally, to tear them apart. Much of human conflict has been one group trying to convince the other that it is right. From Becker's point of view, those conflicts stem from an insecurity about a singular worldview that comes under threat when an alternate explanation erodes that foundation. The dominant narratives have a tendency of locating 'evil' outside of themselves, and that violence against these threatening other views is justified. Religious wars about which god is true, civil wars within countries with differing economic doctrines, genocides that eradicate entire minorities - most conflicts start with finding someone to blame.

The scapegoat is then blamed for all the problems, and there is a collective cooperation of those in the dominant narrative to put aside their mutual antagonisms and bond in a mutual hatred. Ironically, the killing or sacrifice of the scapegoat can foster a kind of temporary peace and cohesion among those who are the 'victors', but the underlying anger, and the ignorance of the endless cycle will remain. When we point our finger in blame at someone, we fall back into that cycle of afflictive emotions and lack of empathy. From ancient ritual killing of animals as sacrifice, to intercontinental ballistic missiles that cause collateral damage, even if we destroy the object we blame, the cycle remains.

As Gandhi once said, "We but mirror the world. All the tendencies present in the outer world are to be found in the world of our body. If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. This is the divine mystery supreme. A wonderful thing it is and the source of our happiness. We need not wait to see what others do." The scapegoat should become, instead of an object of blame, a spirit animal to help us discover other stories and offer a chance at transcending the cycle through a collective exploration of compassionate possibility.

Exploring our own mental models and our own biases cause a shift in perception that opens a door for us to change the way we show up in our lives. This in turn creates a lived example of what is possible, and that influences those around us. This cultivation of empathy through deep inquiry reduces the 'otherness' of those outside of our perspectives and makes it harder to abstract them into evil that must be dealt with. Starting with our deepest fears and strongest beliefs is a place to begin. The seeds of seeing the world as a complex yet beautiful spectrum of colors can be tended to, which allows the tree of wisdom and compassion to bear fruit.

Navin Amarasuriya handed over the reins of his 150-year-old family business to embark on a path less trodden to help students, educators and parents learn about science-based practices of well-being.

A Flower's Job Is To Bloom

Srikumar Rao

A powerful moment in My Fair Lady is when Henry Higgins's mother commiserates with a sobbing Eliza Dolittle. Eliza is distraught because Higgins did not congratulate her after an exemplary performance at the royal ball when the crown prince himself took the first dance with her.

She rebukes Higgins by comparing him to Colonel Pickering, who treats a flower girl as if she were a duchess.

Higgins retorts that he treats a duchess as if she were a flower girl and asserts that he treats everyone the same.

Eliza wanted to feel important and be treated that way.

So do you. So do I. And so does most everyone else.

The problem arises when we want this recognition and applause to come from a specific person or group of persons. Every time our emotional well-being is affected by whether someone else acknowledges us, we construct a prison around ourselves and hand that person the key.

Why would we do that? Why would we ever want to do that?

We do it because we never thought about it and because everyone around us is doing the same. Do we really want our happiness to be controlled by the spigot of other people's attention and acclaim?

Our job as a flower is to bloom. Our fulfillment lies in that.

The rose that blossoms in the wild is not a whit less than the one that does so in a show garden.

Srikumar Rao is business-school professor and author. Excerpt above from his book, Modern Wisdom, Ancient Roots.

Paying Attention

Amishi P. Jha

Attention is thought to have evolved to solve one of the brain's biggest challenges: There is far more information in our environment than the brain can fully process. Without a way to filter, the relentless sensory input we receive would leave us overloaded, incapable of functioning effectively. One way to think about attention is that it's like a flashlight. It allows us to select and direct our brain's computational resources to a smaller subset of information.

We can narrow our sights onto a portion of the page while reading to ensure that the letters and our comprehension remain crisp and clear; or we can direct our attentional flashlight to a conversation partner to key in on her voice in a crowded room. At the brain level, attention works by selectively biasing sensory neural activity so that information that is attended vs. unattended shows a greater neural response.

In addition to their influence on our perceptual experience of sensory input, attention and affiliated executive control processes (such as working memory) are closely related to successful social abilities, emotion regulation, memory, decision making, and performance. Attention determines the moment-to-moment experience of our lives—how we interact, feel, remember, think, and perform. Its influence on all of these functions is why attention is powerful.

While it provides us with a strong evolutionary advantage for maneuvering around in the world, there is one big downside to attention's powerful influence over so many information processing domains. If attention becomes compromised, so too will our ability to perceive, interact, feel, remember, and so on. This, not surprisingly, can cause problems in many areas of our lives.

For example, in one study, we asked participants to pay attention to faces that appeared on the screen one-by-one, and press a button to make categorical judgments about each face. As they performed the task, we recorded their ongoing brain activity. Every now and then, we'd present distracting images that weren't relevant to the task, which could be negative (e.g., scenes of human suffering) or neutral (scenes of everyday innocuous events, e.g., sitting on a bus reading a book). We wanted to know if there were differences in performance and brain activity around the times that negative images appeared, compared to neutral images. Not only was task performance worse around negative (versus neutral) images, but brain activity related to perceiving faces

was reduced. It was as if the attentional flashlight was compromised in its ability to focus on the faces when there were distracting negative images. This was striking because the distracting images appeared only before or after the faces, suggesting that even the memory or anticipation of negative images was potent enough to hijack attention away from the perception of faces as they appeared.

Given attention's fragile nature, especially under intervals rife with external and internal distraction, what can we do to prevent costly attentional lapses? The simple answer: Stay focused on the task-at-hand and don't get hijacked away by distraction. But this is not a useful mandate for two reasons. First, human minds wander between 30 to 50% of our waking moments. Second, when we wander, we are often unaware of it. Thus, since we are prone to wander without awareness, and even more so under high demand intervals, perhaps a more reasonable approach is to do what William James suggested, bring back a wandering attention over and over again.

"The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgment, character, and will. No one is compos sui if he have it not. An education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence. But it is easier to define this ideal than to give practical directions for bringing it about." -- William James (1890)

Amishi Jha is a professor of Psychology and Director of Contemplative Neuroscience, University of Miami, and author of the national bestseller, Peak Mind. *Excerpted from* mindandlife.org/insight/strengthening-attention.

Mental Immunity

Dalai Lama

Everyone knows that physical pain is bad and tries to avoid it. We do this not only by curing diseases, but also by trying to prevent them and by trying to keep our physical immunity strong. Mental pain is equally bad, so we should try to alleviate it as well. The way to do this is to develop mental immunity.

Mental immunity is just learning to avoid the destructive emotions and to develop the positive ones. First, we must understand the mind -- there are so many different states of mind -- the diverse thoughts and emotions we experience on a daily basis. Some of these thoughts and emotions are harmful, even toxic, while others are healthy and healing. The former disturb our mind and cause much mental pain. The latter bring us true joyfulness.

When we understand this reality, it is much easier to deal with the mind and to take preventive measures. This is how we develop mental immunity. And just as a healthy immune system and healthy constitution protects your body against potentially hazardous viruses and bacteria, mental immunity creates a healthy disposition of the mind so that it will be less susceptible to negative thoughts and feelings.

Think about it this way. If your health is strong, when viruses come they will not make you sick. If your overall health is weak, even small viruses will be very dangerous for you. Similarly, if your mental health is sound, then when disturbances come, you will have some distress but quickly recover. If your mental health is not good, then small disturbances, small problems will cause you much pain and suffering. You will have much fear and worry, much sadness and despair, and much anger and aggravation.

People would like to be able to take a pill that makes their fear and anxiety go away and makes them immediately feel peaceful. This is impossible. One must develop the mind over time and cultivate mental immunity. Often people ask me for the quickest and best solution to a problem. Again, this is impossible. You can have quickest or you can have best solution, but not both. The best solution to our suffering is mental immunity, but it takes time to develop.

One time I was talking with Al Gore, the American vice president. He said that he had lots of problems, lots of difficulties that were causing him a great deal of anxiety. I said to him that we human beings have the ability to make a distinction between the rational level and the emotional level.

At the rational level, we accept that this is a serious problem that we have to deal with, but at the deeper, emotional level, we are able to keep calm. Like the ocean has many waves on the surface but deep down it is quite calm. This is possible if we know how to develop mental immunity.

Excerpted from The Book of Joy.

~ ~

Why I Stopped Fighting

Indigo Ocean

When I was a teenage girl, I had a fight with an older boy who had at least fifty pounds on me. It was a pre-announced fight, so many other students had gathered around

to watch. I recall having the upper hand for much of the fight, hitting him dozens of times for every one blow he landed on me. I knocked him to the ground over and over again, using his own weight against him.

At one point, I noticed an elderly woman watching from a window. I saw her looking at me with fear in her eyes. But why me? I was the good guy in this fight! The discrepancy shook me. I had never seen myself as someone to be feared. And there a gap was created in who I knew myself to be.

Suddenly, I looked at the boy I was fighting and saw Jesus the Christ looking back at me. I looked around and the Christ Consciousness appeared in everyone standing there. I also understood that he had no idea he was the Christ.

No, he was very convinced that he was a boy who meant me harm. But I knew the truth, so I couldn't hit him again.

I could still block though. Once I stopped fighting, he managed to knock me to the ground for the first time, climbed upon my chest, and started punching my shoulders and arms as I protected my head. Through it all I was not the least afraid or angry. All my anger had dissipated and I knew that I would be fine. Eventually, I heard police sirens, which prompted him to get off me and run.

That was but one in a number of satori experiences I've had in my lifetime. Thankfully, the rest involved no violence! Each time, I did not need to seek the Truth; I simply knew what was true to be true and what was false to be false. There was no manipulation. Awareness emerged from Grace. [...]

Viewed with an understanding that all arises within the Self, that all is Awareness, we do not stop caring. We do not stop helping. We simply do it with a natural equilibrium, like water flowing from areas of higher pressure to areas of lower pressure. No one needs to tell water where it ought to go; its nature is to simply flow.

Through immersing our attention in love of Awareness, this same type of spaciousness can be cultivated in daily life. Worship Awareness. Give yourself completely over to love in as many moments as you can. Live on your knees, kissing the ground of true nature.

Excerpted from lionsroar.com/the-ultimate-service

~ ~

Reality Of Actual Contact With Oneself

Judith Blackstone

The reality of actual contact with oneself is, at the same time, actual contact with our environment. It is a very interesting aspect of our nature that to heal the split between body and mind is, at the same time, to heal the split between

oneself and one's surroundings, or in between oneself and other people. Life is, to some extent, imaginary or illusory--for everyone. We all regard life through the filter of our past experience and our templates, our early learning of the world. We all color our circumstances with our hopes and fears. We also imagine a barrier between ourselves and our environment. We imagine a separation between a world out there and the consciousness (in here) that perceives the world.

As we come into greater contact with ourselves and the world, these filters and projections begin to dissolve. We find that there is no separation between ourselves as subject and what we perceive as object. All of our experience, both internal and external, registers at once in the same single, unified expanse of consciousness. This direct, immediate contact with life feels like it is happening, right now, it feels real; it feels complete; there is no part of ourselves that is left out of the experience of the present moment.

The reality that the Hindu prayer ['lead me from illusion to reality'] pleads for is not the world most people perceive of separate, solid material objects. The sobriety of spiritual practice is a stripping down, not to matter, but to something much more mysterious, to the unified luminous transparency pervading everything. We cannot get to this dimension by avoiding the material world. We need to accept and penetrate through the world of separate solid objects, and to inhabit fully our own separate physical body in order to experience ourselves and our environment as the single expanse of fundamental consciousness.

More about Judith Blackstone at
awakin.org/v2/calls/501/judith-blackstone/

On Love

Justin Faerman

I see so many people talking about the world's problems but so few talking about the solution to them: Love. It really is that simple despite how complicated we often try to make it.

Pretty hard to keep a war going when people are focused on love. Pretty hard to have an economic crisis when people are cooperating together in love. Pretty hard to have supply chain issues and destroy the environment when people are engaging the earth with love.

And then some say: "Ah… but it is easy for you to say, because you have privilege!" But what good is privilege

if it is not used for love? If the so-called privileged cannot even love then how can anyone else be expected to? I say it is the duty of the privileged to love, for if they don't then they are not privileged to begin with!

Because the only true privilege in life is to love.

And then some say: "But there are many who would laugh at this idea… who would ridicule it… even fight it!" And I say to you: I have never heard a convincing argument against love. And I have never dreamed of a compelling future which does not include it. And anyone I've ever met who has lived without it is clearly in pain and suffering.

And then there are others still who say that this is high minded idealism and the reality is that we could never get everyone on board! And I say to them that humanity has never accomplished anything of value unless high minded idealism has been at play. And that history is filled with examples of small groups of idealistic, inspired people changing the world.

And further still I say that Love in human form is not a perfect state of being. It is a choice that you make over and over again. It is a commitment to a principle that you return to despite your inevitable deviations from it. It is a standard that you hold for all your decisions ... all your choices ... all your relationships ... That you measure them by, that you do your best to uphold even in the face of great pain, that you return to when you are lost.

This is Love.

And you will know when you have found it by the way that it feels.

Ultimately, this is humanity's only problem -- That we have become disconnected from this feeling of Love. All other issues find their roots here.

And it is thus our only true need -- to return to this feeling.

The world will do everything in its power to convince you otherwise. And it is trying its damndest right now.

Or, depending on how you look at it ... giving you infinitely more opportunity to embrace it at an entirely new level of depth.

Justin Faerman is a consciousness researcher and an entrepreneur.

mindfulness
meditation
awareness
awareness
awareness
awareness
awareness
awareness
awareness
awareness

Slavery To The Senses

Swami Vivekananda

We are all slaves to our senses, slaves to our own minds, conscious and subconscious. The reason why a criminal is a criminal is not because he desires to be one, but because he has not his mind under control and is therefore a slave to his own conscious and subconscious mind, and to the mind of everybody else. He must follow the dominant trend of his own mind; he cannot help it; he is forced onward in spite of himself, in spite of his own better promptings, his own better nature; he is forced to obey the dominant mandate of his own mind. Poor man, he cannot help himself.

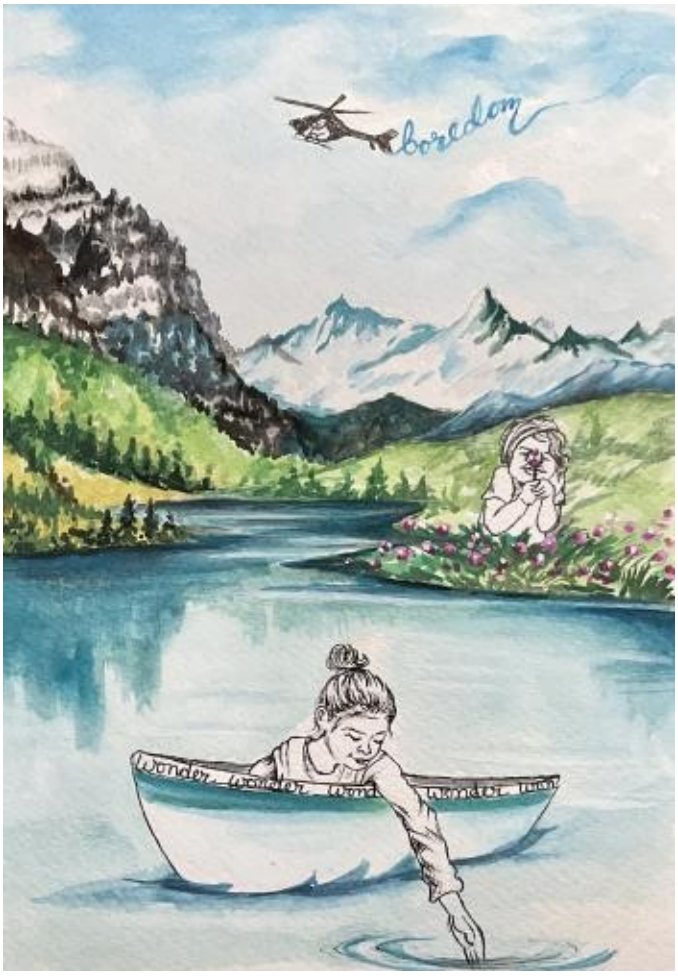
We see this in our own lives constantly. We are constantly doing things against the better side of our nature, and afterwards we upbraid ourselves for so doing and wonder what we could have been thinking of, how we could do such a thing! Yet again and again we do it, and again and again we suffer for it and upbraid ourselves. At the time, perhaps, we think we desire to do it, but we only desire it because we are forced to desire it. We are forced onward, we are helpless! We are all slaves to our own and to everybody else's mind; whether we are good or bad, that makes no difference. We are led here and there because we cannot help ourselves. We say we think, we do. It is not so. We think because we have to think. We act because we have to. We are slaves to ourselves and to others.

Deep down in our subconscious mind, the great boundless ocean of subjective mind, [lie] all the thoughts and actions of the past. Each one of these is striving to be recognized, pushing outward for expression, surging, wave

after wave, out upon the objective mind, the conscious mind. These thoughts, the stored-up energy, we classify as natural desires, talents, etc. But that is because we do not realize their true origin. We obey them blindly, unquestioningly; and slavery, the most helpless kind of slavery, is the result; and we call ourselves free. Free! We who cannot for a moment govern our own minds, nay, cannot hold our minds on a subject, focus it on a point to the exclusion of everything else for a moment! Yet we call ourselves free. Think of it! We cannot do as we know we ought to do even for a very short space of time. Some sense-desire will crop up, and immediately we obey it. Our conscience smites us for such weakness, but again and again we do it, we are always doing it. We cannot live up to a high standard of life, try as we will. The ghosts of past thoughts, past lives hold us down.

All the misery of the world is caused by this slavery to the senses. Our inability to rise above the sense-life -- the striving for physical pleasures -- is the cause of all the horrors and miseries in the world. [...] The mind uncontrolled and unguided will drag us down, down, for ever -- rend us, kill us; and the mind controlled and guided will save us, free us.

Swami Vivekananda was a Hindu monk, philosopher and author. Excerpt above from his talk in 1900 at vivekananda.net/Lectures/ToAsk/ImportanceOfPsychology.html.



Wonder Increases As Speed Decreases

David Haskell

Indulge me for a moment: let's do a short thought experiment. We'll compare two different mornings. On one, you'll fly coast-to-coast, a five hour journey. Imagine yourself in the high-backed seat, being flung across hundreds

of miles as the hours creep by. What feeling comes to mind? Boredom. The need for distraction is intense: a book, a movie, a crinkly bag of peanuts. Now, imagine another morning. Pick any point along the flight path and spend those same five hours in a stroll across fields, urban neighborhoods, or forests. What mental states come to mind? Not boredom, for sure. Engagement or curiosity, perhaps?

So, wonder increases as speed decreases. As we cover less ground, we uncover more; as we narrow the field of view, our horizons expand. Monks from the East know this: in one breath is Every Thing. Poets from the West know this also: says Blake, "…a World in a Grain of Sand." But this truth is seen not just by meditators and mystics. Almost all literature is built on the same understanding. Tolstoy may have opened Anna Karenina with the claim that, "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way," but the next nine hundred pages are not about "all" and "every," instead they examine the particularities of just a few. Through an intense focus on a handful of people, Tolstoy painted a more comprehensive picture of human relationships than could any all-covering textbook.

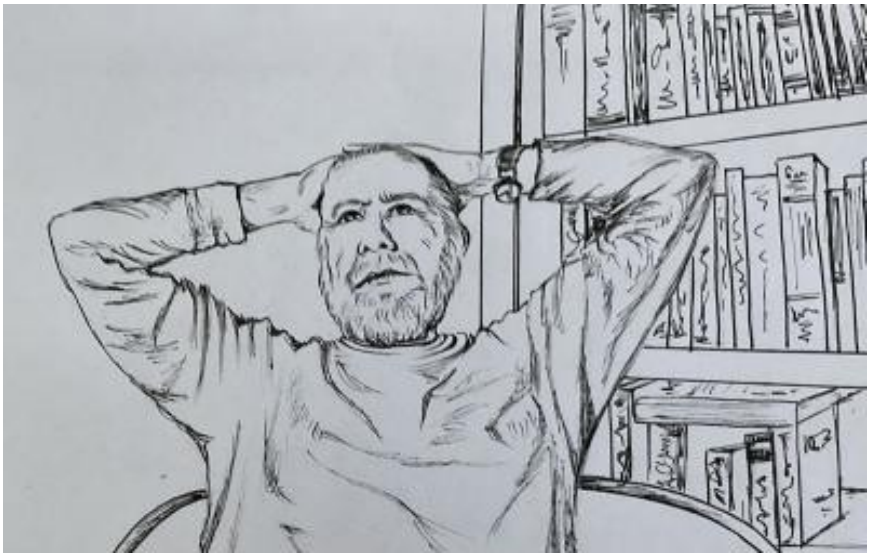
I took this insight to the woods to see what I could learn. I spent a year watching one square meter of forest, giving my attention to the life of this small circle of leaves. The patch of forest became my window into the natural world. During that year, I saw a parade of salamanders, beetles, worms, fungi, flowers, songbirds, ants, caterpillars, shrews, and leaves. The activity present in a tiny patch of forest was astonishing. More astonishing, though, was what I could not see. In one half handful of soil, a billion microbes live out their lives. We humans can't see them, but we can smell their warm odors in the soil and see their action as autumn's leaves gradually sink down into the earth. Without this hidden "99%," the rest of life would not be possible.

Sitting in the forest for hundreds of hours opened my senses. I connected to the variegated physicality of the world in ways that enriched my experience and helped me better

understand the workings of the forest. The quality of light, for example, varies dramatically through the year. In the summer, photon-greedy tree leaves steal most of the colors from the light spectrum, creating a greeny-yellow world below the forest canopy. A red-feathered bird therefore looks dusky and dull in summer – trees have stolen the red light, so none is available to bounce off the bird's plumage. But if the bird positions itself in an unimpeded ray of sunlight, its colors kindle into a brilliant blaze. In autumn, the trees release their hold and the forest's palate opens up. The herbaceous plants on the forest floor put on a surge of growth to make use of this new-found richness.

We find wonder in the world not by hurling ourselves across the planet on airplanes in search of wonderful places. Rather, wonder comes when we give our attention to the world, starting with our homes. By coming to our senses, attending to the smell, touch, sounds, and sights around us, we can start to hear the remarkable stories of our world. Don't take my word for it, though. Pick a small area wherever you live – a tree in a park, a small circle of land behind your house, a stream behind an apartment complex – and honor it with your attention. Don't expect drama or enlightenment, just watch quietly over the months and see the world come alive.

David Haskell is the author of The Forest Unseen.
He lives in Sewanee, Tennessee, where
he and his wife run Cudzoo Farm,
a small homestead producing
hand-crafted goat milk soaps.



Lessons On My 70th Birthday

Kevin Kelly

Today is my birthday. I turn 70. I've learned a few things so far that might be helpful to others. For the past few years, I've jotted down bits of unsolicited advice each year and much to my surprise I have more to add this year. So here is my birthday gift to you all: bits of wisdom I wish I had known when I was young.

• About 99% of the time, the right time is right now.

• No one is as impressed with your possessions as you are.

• Dont ever work for someone you dont want to become.

• Cultivate 12 people who love you, because they are worth more than 12 million people who like you.

• Dont keep making the same mistakes; try to make new mistakes.

• Anything you say before the word “but” does not count.

• When you forgive others, they may not notice, but you will heal. Forgiveness is not something we do for others; it is a gift to ourselves.

• Whenever there is an argument between two sides, find the third side.

• The best work ethic requires a good rest ethic.

• When you lead, your real job is to create more leaders, not more followers.

• Criticize in private, praise in public.

• Productivity is often a distraction. Don’t aim for better ways to get through your tasks as quickly as possible, rather aim for better tasks that you never want to stop doing.

• Your growth as a conscious being is measured by the number of uncomfortable conversations you are willing to have.

• Speak confidently as if you are right, but listen carefully as if you are wrong.

• Three things you need: The ability to not give up something till it works, the ability to give up something that does not work, and the trust in other people to help you distinguish between the two.

• You’ll get 10x better results by elevating good behavior rather than punishing bad behavior, especially in children and animals.

• Ask anyone you admire: Their lucky breaks happened on a detour from their main goal. So embrace detours. Life is not a straight line for anyone.

• Don’t wait for the storm to pass; dance in the rain.

• A great way to understand yourself is to seriously reflect on everything you find irritating in others.

• What you do on your bad days matters more than what you do on your good days.

• You will be judged on how well you treat those who can do nothing for you.

• We tend to overestimate what we can do in a day, and underestimate what we can achieve in a decade. Miraculous things can be accomplished if you give it ten years. A long game will compound small gains to overcome even big mistakes.

• It's thrilling to be extremely polite to rude strangers.

• Copying others is a good way to start. Copying yourself is a disappointing way to end.

• If your opinions on one subject can be predicted from your opinions on another, you may be in the grip of an ideology. When you truly think for yourself your conclusions will not be predictable.

• The chief prevention against getting old is to remain astonished.

Kevin Kelly is a writer, photographer, and student of digital culture. Excerpted from kk.org/thetechnium/103-bits-of-advice-i-wish-i-had-known/.

~ ~

Fishing Before You Know How To Fish

Courtney Martin

Through the pines and the one maple I hear her.
I shouldn't have gone fishing if I didn't know how to fish.
I shouldn't have gone fishing if I didn't know how to fish.
There she stands
legs impossibly long
pink and black polka dot swimsuit baggy
pole in her hands
and a little oval sunfish impossibly on her hook.
I don't tell her, but I do think
Oh, sweet girl, life is always like that.
Fishing before you know how to fish.
Leaving before you know how to leave.
Speaking before you know how to speak.
Fighting before you know how to fight.
Loving before you know how to love.
Dying before you know how to die.
We are all the child with the pole
worrying about who we've hurt.
And we are all the fish on the hook,
hoping for mercy.
Her aunt hears her muttering prayer
and though she hasn't unhooked a fish in 30 years
grabs the wriggling innocent in her hands
and dislodges metal from cheek.
And this, too, is all of us.
Saved again and again by prayer we didn't know we were saying
and a witness we forgot was listening.

Courtney Martin is an author, speaker and mom.
She wrote the poem above for her daughter, Megan.

The Opponent Relationship Is Not A Contest

Shannon Lee

What is combat, after all, but an intense relationship? Your opponent attempts to block and counter every strike you throw as well as land strikes of his own, which he will do in direct response to the signals he reads off you. He will also sense your energy, your reaction time, whether you seem confident or unsure, whether you move with experience, whether you hold his gaze, any patterns you have, etc. And while he is relating to you, he is adjusting himself as well. He is adjusting his strategy, his technique, his approach. If you land a strike, then he has to asses how you found an opening in him and vice versa. It's a dance. It's a relationship.

Does it sound familiar? It should, because we are reassessing one another every day, sensing the energy and adjusting accordingly. You show up excited and upbeat for a lunch date with a friend, but when you arrive, you find them flat and morose. If you are aware, you probably downshift a bit. Maybe you ask what's wrong or you try to get them to laugh, but you respond to what you're getting based on what you're sensing. Even when we interact with a total stranger, like the checkout person in a store or the mailman, we notice if someone is rude or pleasant and we respond in turn with either an inward annoyance or a friendly smile. We are in relationship all the time, and our relationships are a reflection of our own inner world.

To learn and to grow, you need relationships. You need that sparring partner to level up your game. Simply put for our purposes here, there is no one better than the person standing before you at any given moment to help you see yourself more clearly. Someone who is there, whether they know it or not and whether you've known it or not, to show you where the pain points are, to show you how to be better and how to shine your light more brightly. Because you are in response to your environment all the time, your environment becomes a reflection of you. So what can you learn about yourself? Where can you discover the cause of your own ignorance? How can you become better from this? But be aware: You want to become better, not better than! The opponent relationship is not a contest.

In her book, "Be Water, My Friend."

~ ~

Faith Is Different Than Beliefs

Reb Zalman

Where there is faith, there are fewer beliefs. We use beliefs to shore up opinions, rather than a relationship with the cosmos. Faith is what we call the relationship with the cosmos. It's different than beliefs.

Beliefs would be sort of the candy that comes in a candy wrapper, out of faith. But faith is the function, the deep deep function. So when you use the word faith as a noun, it doesn't work. “I should have faith.” You know, I should go to the grocery store and see if I can buy some faith. It doesn't go that way.

So what is faith? Faith is “faith-ing.” It's a verb. It's an activity. It's a function. And the function goes like this: “I open myself up to the central intelligence of the universe, so that I might live for the purpose for which I was made.”
And when I can come with that attitude, which is the attitude that seeks to be in truth, which seeks to be able to say: what does surrender mean? Surrender means, I'm letting go of how I would like the world to be, and I'm asking the universe, "How do you want me to understand you?”

The beliefs are always going to get us into trouble! (laughs) I remember the bumper sticker that said, “Don't believe everything you think!” In a way it's saying, your mind and your usual way [don’t] have it together.

My experiences with fundamentalists that have been good experiences have happened when I've said to those brothers, (sisters weren’t much among them), I said to them: “Let's not talk about the difference between the church in

Jerusalem, and the church in Greece and in Rome, and about the Jews of that time, [etc.]. Let's talk about today."

You love God; I love God. [So for example,] do you think the book of Psalms is a good book to study? And then we sit down and we study the book of Psalms together. They can take any translation they want and I go back to the original Hebrew. And the thing is getting to be so good, because they have a *ta'am* (taste), they have a feeling: this is the word of God.

When you get to the place where you study [a sacred text] in such a way, you become a lot softer. Because then those holy words are not slogans.

Reb Zalman was one of the founders of the Jewish Renewal movement and an innovator in ecumenical dialogue.

~ ~

Three States Of Water

Natureza Gabriel Kram

Imagine that you've never been to Earth. You visit first in winter, where someone introduces you to water. From a glass, they pour it out over your hand. You drink. Remarkable.

Imagine that you walk outside onto a frozen lake. You've never seen this substance before. You kick at it with the toe of your boot: solid. You drop to your hands and knees, it grips your palm when you press your hand against it: bone-chillingly cold. What is this, you ask? Your guide replies, water.

Imagine that you walk into a steam room. Hot vapor swirls in an obscuring fog. What is this cloud? you ask. Again, water, comes the answer.

If you encountered water for the first time, wearing her three faces, you would not believe she was a single element. Yet of course, each of these– liquid water, ice, and steam is, indeed, water, in different states. A liquid, a solid, a gas: their physical properties entirely different; contradictory, in fact.

I have now explained Polyvagal Theory to you, through the lens of water. It explains the relationship between the autonomic nervous system and social behavior, and how, depending on whether we feel safe or in danger, it surfaces varying neural platforms that shape our bodily experience, emotions and thoughts, perceptions, and behaviors.

Water, in its liquid state, can be still or fast-flowing yet behaves liquidly. In our analogy, liquid water represents our connection system. This is the neural platform active when we feel safe enough in our bodies to open to connection; it unites the heart and breath with the face and the voice. There is an old adage that some people wear their hearts on their

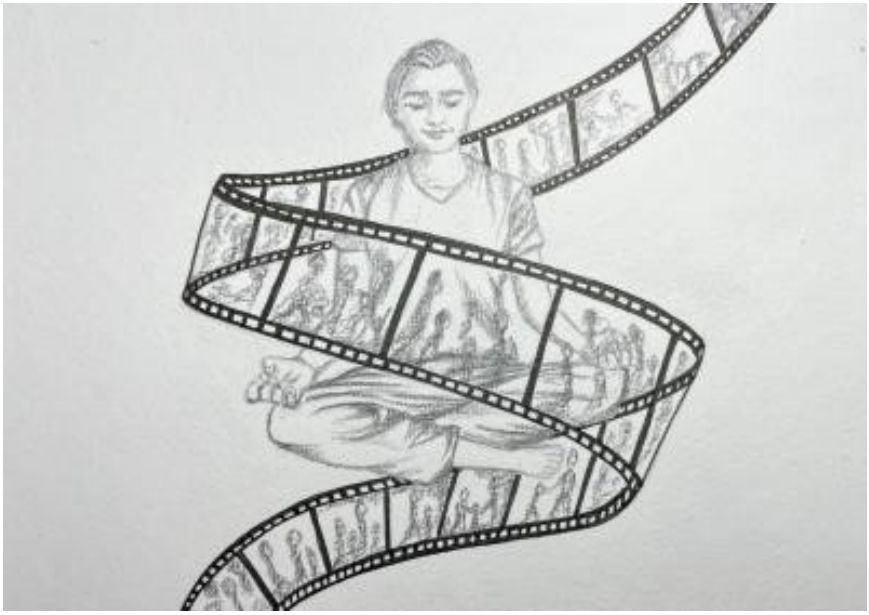
sleeves, but that's not quite true; we actually wear our heart on our face and in our voice. The capacity of the vagus nerve is reflected in our heart-rate variability and through the expression on our face and the prosody of our voice. [...]

You, like liquid water changing to steam, are different when safety is absent. Steam represents the fight or flight system: high-energy defensive response evoked to respond to threat. Steam shows up as fight energy or as flight energy. The emotional correlate of fight is the continuum of anger, from mild irritation to homicidal rage. The emotional correlate of flight is the continuum of fear, from mild worry to terror. [...]

Our bodies typically respond to feeling unsafe by shifting from liquid water, to steam, to ice. If steam doesn't get us safe—if we can't fight or flee our way out of threat—ice immobilizes us. Its physiological action is a metabolic drop and shutdown, and if it comes on strongly it evokes the release of endogenous opiates (painkillers) to numb us out to impending death. Ice is the threat response of last resort. Whereas the emotional continuum of steam is anger and fear, that of ice is akin to depression. It is a withdrawal, a collapse, a social death. It correlates with dissociation.

Knowing where we are polyvagally—steam, ice, or water—points us toward what we need to come back home. Steam must cool and condense to return to liquid water, but ice can be cooled indefinitely and it will not melt. Supporting wellness requires meeting the needs of present-moment nervous system state. When you are steam, you see as steam sees. And you, and the world, look a certain way. Change the state and the story follows. Condense the vapor back into liquid water and the way the person perceives shifts on its own.

Natureza Gabriel Kram is a connection phenomenologist, author of Restorative Practices of Wellbeing*, and convener of the Restorative Practices Alliance.*



Error Of Perception

Ramana Maharshi

Q: Are names and forms real?

Ramana Maharshi: You won't find them separate from [*reality]*. When you try to get at name and form, you will find reality only. Therefore attain the knowledge of that which is real in all three states [waking, dreaming and sleeping].

Q: Is it a fact that dreams arise because of impressions received during the waking state?

RM: No, it is not true. In your dream you see many new things and many people whom you have never seen before in your waking state. You may even see a second dream within the dream. After waking up from the second dream, you may feel that you have woken up, but that is the

waking state of the first dream. In the same way, man wakes up daily, but it is not to a real waking state.

Q: Why do we see the world as something real?

RM: We see so much on a cinema screen, but it is not real. Nothing is real there except the screen. In the same way, in the waking state, there is nothing but the *[reality]*. Knowledge of the waking state is knowledge of the knower of the waking state. Both go away in sleep.

Q: Why do we see such permanency and constancy in the waking state?

RM: It is seen on account of wrong ideas. When someone says that he took a bath in the same river twice, he is wrong because when he bathed for the second, time, the river was not the same as it was when he bathed for the first time. Somebody may say that he is seeing the same fruit every day, but really, a lot of changes are taking place in the fruit. On seeing the brightness of a flame, a man says that he sees the same flame, but the flame is changing every second. As the oil gets less and less, the flame keeps on changing. The waking state is also like this. The stationary appearance is an error of perception.

Q: Whose is the error?

RM: The knower.

Q: From where did the knower come?

RM: On account of the error of perception. In fact, the knower and his false knowledge appear simultaneously, and when the knowledge of the Self is obtained, they disappear simultaneously.

Q: From where did the knower and his ignorance come?

RM: Who is asking this question?

Q: I.

RM: Find out that 'I' and all your doubts will be solved. Just as in a dream, a false knower, knowledge and known rise up, in the waking state the same process operates. In both states, on knowing this 'I' you know everything, and nothing remains to be known. If, in the waking state, there is [inquiry] into the 'I', everything can be understood and nothing else will remain to be known. In deep sleep knower, knowledge and known are absent. At the time of experiencing the true 'I' they will also not exist. Whatever you see happening in the waking state happens only to the knower, and since the knower is unreal, nothing in fact ever happens.

Q: After waking from sleep, why does the world of the previous day appear the same?

RM: The world seen on the previous day was not real. It was the knowledge of an unreal knower. In the same way, the world of the next day is also is the knowledge of an unreal knower. For the *[ignorant]* the world is experienced as yesterday and today. But for the *[awakened]* the world is not there at any time, past, present or future.

Excerpted from https://www.davidgodman.org/power-presence-part-one-excerpt/2/

Garden Teaches Us To Travel

James Carse

If indifference *to* nature leads to the machine, the indifference *of* nature leads to the garden. All culture has the form of gardening: the encouragement of spontaneity in others by way of one's own, the respect for source, and the refusal to convert source into resource. [...]

Inasmuch as gardens do not conclude with a harvest and are not played for a certain outcome, one never arrives anywhere with a garden.

A garden is a place where growth is found. It has its own source of change. One does not bring change to a garden, but comes to a garden prepared for change, and therefore prepared to change. It is possible to deal with growth only out of growth. True parents do not see to it that their children grow in a particular way, according to a preferred pattern or scripted stages, but they see to it that they grow with their children. The character of one's parenting, if it is genuinely dramatic, must be constantly altered from within as the children change from within. So, too, with teaching, or working with, or loving each other.
It is in the garden that we discover what travel truly is. We do not journey to a garden but by way of it.

Genuine travel has no destination. Travelers do not go somewhere, but constantly discover they are somewhere else. Since gardening is a way not of subduing the indifference of nature but of raising one's own spontaneity to respond to the disregarding vagaries and unpredictabilities of nature, we do not look on nature as a sequence of changing scenes but look on ourselves as persons in passage.

Nature does not change; it has no inside or outside. It is therefore not possible to travel *through* it. All travel is therefore change within the traveler, and it is for that reason that travelers are always somewhere else. To travel is to grow.

Genuine travelers travel not to overcome distance but to discover distance. It is not distance that makes travel necessary, but travel that makes distance possible. Distance is not determined by the measurable length between objects, but by the actual differences between them. The motels around the airports in Chicago and Atlanta are so little different from the motels around the airports of Tokyo and Frankfurt that all essential distances dissolve in likeness. What is truly separated is distinct; it is unlike. "The only true voyage would be not to travel through a hundred different lands with the same pair of eyes, but to see the same land through a hundred different pairs of eyes" (Proust).

A gardener, whose attention is ever on the spontaneities of nature, acquires the gift of seeing differences, looks always for the merest changes in plant growth, or in the composition of the soil, the emerging populations of insects and earthworms. So will gardeners, as parents, see changes of the smallest subtlety in their children, or as teachers see the signs of an increasing skill, and possibly wisdom, in their students. A garden, a family, a classroom-any place of human gathering whatsoever-will offer no end of variations to be observed, each an arrow pointing toward yet more changes. But these observed changes are not theatrically amusing to genuine gardeners; they dramatically open themselves to a renewed future.

So, too, with those who look everywhere for difference, who see the earth as source, who celebrate the genius in others, who are not prepared against but for surprise. "I have traveled far in Concord" (Thoreau).

Excerpt above from James Carse's book: Finite and Infinite Games.

~ ~

Sweeping My Heart

Zenju Earthlyn Manuel

For me, a dark-skinned person of African descent, cleaning the temple as Zen practice felt inappropriate and uncomfortable when I was at the beginning of my training. When you are an older black woman and a young white man tells you how to mop the floor during work period, the experience is akin to being a maid or a reminder of slavery. Ordinary temple work is the kind of labor often relegated in this country to folks of color and poor people. It is work that can ensure a lower rank in society. [...]

For those who suffer from internalized "isms" like racism and sexism, to be humbled by spiritual practice is counter to their task of wellness and healing from dehumanization. If anything, they are looking to emerge from the place of submission. They are looking for a place to speak rather than be silent, to communicate the suffering of all "isms" being played out while sweeping the temple's floor.

Yet, I stayed with Zen practice, doing the mundane, and years later I scrubbed the toilets when I was head student, in order, they say, to remain humble. The more I bowed, the more I scrubbed. Eventually, I felt my ancestors moving my body, back and forth. They told me this work was good. I was skeptical.

Me: "Really? I don't need this."

Ancestors: "Exactly. You feel you have become better than us.

Me: “I went to school because you said education was the best thing for black people. I got a Ph.D. so I don’t need to do what black folks have always done.”

Ancestors: “Your pride is no good to us. Your degree is no good to us. We need your heart to be healed. Don’t let intellect take the place of love. You must love more.”

I swept longer, breathing, listening, crying. This is true, I say to myself.

Me: “But I worked so hard not to be oppressed as you were. I worked for justice. I prayed. I ate well. I did good deeds most of my life.”

Ancestors: “We need more than that from you. We don’t need you to be a good Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, follower of African Orishas, or whatever. We need you to remember the dust from which you came. We need you to remember a time before things went crazy, when they sold Africans like us. There was something before. It is still hidden from you. Find it. Keep sweeping—not to clean but to see and hear where your heart is blocked from what we see for you. We put you in a place where you would be bothered enough to change.”

Today when I clean the temple, I know it is my ancestors calling. I know that the memory within me of their existence as slaves is being understood and transformed. I know that temple cleaning is the motion arising from sitting meditation, not history repeating itself.

If I am fortunate enough to be offered a chance to sweep, it is a profound time with my own heart—to use the broom as a ritual connecting this life and the lives of those in my past. I am not replicating what my ancestors did as slaves. On the contrary, they have brought me to this moment.

Zenju Earthlyn Manuel is an author, visual artist, drummer, and Zen Buddhist priest. Excerpt above from this essay.
https://www.lionsroar.com/sweeping-my-heart/

The Self Is Not A Thing, But A Process

Thomas Metzinger

The body and the mind are constantly changing. Nothing in us is ever really the same from one moment to the next. Yet the self represents a very strong phenomenal experience of sameness, and it's clear this would be adaptive or helpful for a biological organism that needs to plan for the future. If you want to hide some food for winter or you want to save some money in your bank accounts or work on your

reputation, you're planning for future success and you wouldn't do that if you didn't have the very strong feeling that it's going to be the same entity that gets the reward in the future. [...]

So obviously in a biological or bodily context it may be good to have this experience that all of this, the reaping of the fruits, is going to happen to the same person. But again, strictly speaking, it's never really happening to the same person, but it's also not true that there is nobody there. Of course, there is a sufficient similarity over time. We don't arbitrarily change and it's kind of a flux. I like very much the image the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein once used.

He said you could have a rope—a long rope made of very different strings of different color. And no string, neither the red string nor the blue nor the green one, would go through the whole length of the rope. Yet the rope could be very robust, strong, and stable, even though there is not one thread that goes through it from beginning to end. I think that's a good image for how we are on the bodily level, as well as on a psychological level.

Despite this, we have robust experiences of autonomy and self- determination. We have the experience of controlling our behavior, and we also have an experience of mental self- determination, controlling our attention, our mental state and all of these things. As modern science shows, these experiences may not be fully veridical, but just adaptive. It may be functional to have the robust experience that you are in control, but from the third person perspective of science, it seems that such experiences may not reflect the truth of our nature. The self is not a thing, but a process.

From: https://deconstructingyourself.com/what-is-the-self-metzinger.html

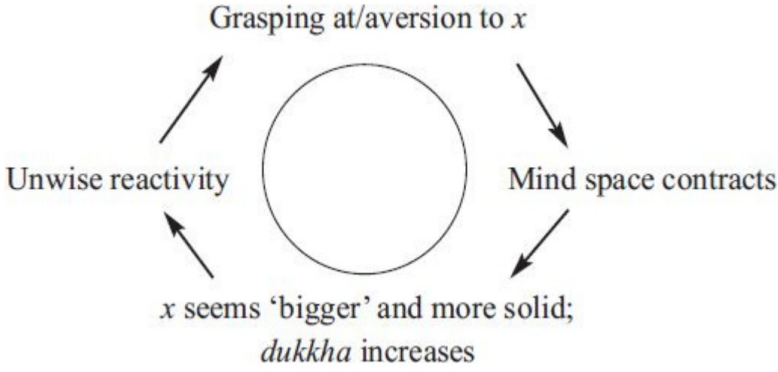
Pay Attention To A Sense Of Space

Rob Burbea

Whenever there is any grasping or aversion towards something, indeed whenever any hindrances are present, the mind is, to some degree or other, in a contracted state. It has, so to speak, been sucked in to some perception, some object of consciousness, has shrunk and tightened around it.

Generally we experience this contraction in the mind as an unpleasant state of suffering. We can notice this contraction, this constriction of the mental space, in relation to both internal and external phenomena. It will be evident, for instance, with regard to some unpleasant sensation in the body, like tiredness, or a difficult emotion, such as fear. And we may also detect it sometimes in social situations, if a certain relationship is charged.

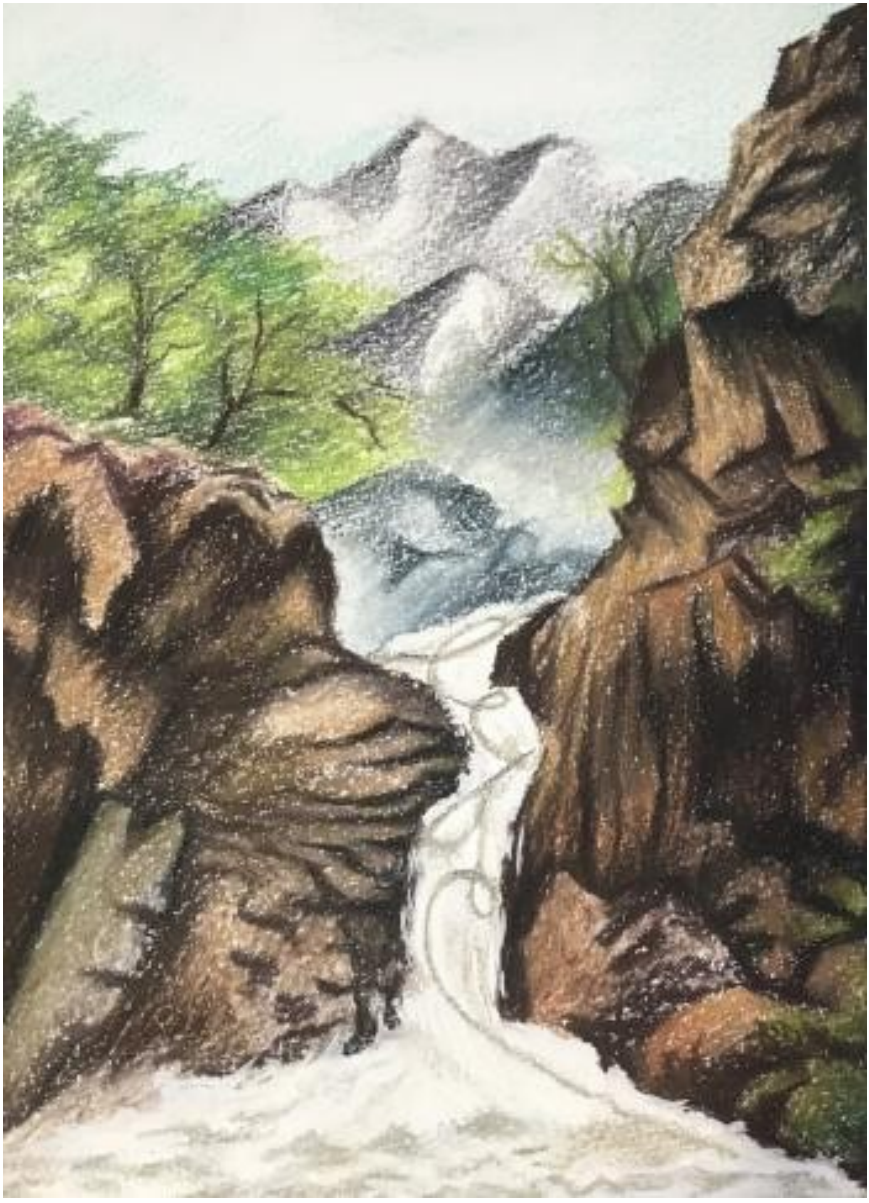
The clinging mind contracts around some experience, and then, because the mind space is shrunken, the object of that grasping or aversion takes up proportionately more of the space in the mind. It thus seems somehow larger, and also more solid – its size and seeming solidity both corresponding to the degree of contraction in the mind. With the object appearing then bigger and more solid, and the experience of contraction being painful to some degree, the mind without insight in that moment will usually react unskillfully. It will unconsciously try to escape the situation by increasing the grasping or aversion, in a way that only keeps it stuck or even makes things worse. For unfortunately this further grasping keeps the mind space contracted, or contracts it even more. This makes the issue, the perception, still larger and more solid, setting up a vicious circle in which the mind is trapped.



It can be very helpful, when the awareness is unwisely sucked in in this way, to pay attention deliberately to a sense of space. This can be done in a number of ways: by opening the awareness to the totality of sounds that are coming and going; by opening up the field of vision; by intentionally noticing the space around and between objects, and the space in any room or situation. Noticing space opens up the perception, and can begin to dissolve the vicious circle. Even attention to external physical space can help to open and ease the constriction of the mind, and can create a sense of space around an internal experience such as bodily discomfort or a difficult emotion.

Space is not emptiness, and emptiness is not a space of any kind. Rather, our investigation here is simply into how the mind gives solidity to experience and fabricates sufferings through the very ways we relate to, see, and conceive of things. We gradually learn to untangle the tangle of suffering. And again, like all deliberate shifts in the way of looking, the more we do it, the more accessible it becomes. The more we practice inclining the mind to notice space, the easier it becomes to actually open up some space in the perception and experience some relief.

Rob Burbea (1965-2020) was a medication teacher and author. Excerpt above from the book Seeing That Frees.



Turning Survival Inside Out

Kerri Lake

You know how people will lament when they say, "Time to get back to reality," or "…yeah, but that's not how the real world works"? What is the real world? Who suggested that toil, despair and various flavors of enslavement are what's "real"?

That despair distills from a relationship with survival. Humanity has been feeding itself the message that survival is hard, survival is good, survival of the fittest is best. There is also a saying that goes something like, "If you're only ever given a hammer, then everything else will look like a nail." When the focus of life is on survival, then everything looks like a competitive struggle.

Life itself is not trying to survive. Life begets life. Life celebrates itself in every subtlety and every overwhelm. Every aspect of life remains open and flexible, available to what might be required for its perpetuation. Even in an environment that seems to be lacking the means, somehow, life finds its way.

As a human, with this super-fast processor we call a mind-brain (which I have affectionately nicknamed "Thinkytown" or "Thinky Town" if you prefer), you have an option in every moment to look around and see survival or look around and see life. You'll be right either way. You will find both.

For some, being right is everything! It's their whole life. They don't know who they are without a struggle to be right. So, let's let them be right, and then ask, "show me the truth."

Truth is in the realm of the heart. You won't find just one right Truth or wrong Truth that the heart sequesters away, teasing you with unsolvable puzzle after unsolvable puzzle, calling it "the real world." Truth is a feeling. It sings to you with an absence of conflict, a lightness that requires no defense and offers no offense. To welcome a relationship with truth is to welcome an intimacy from which you cannot hide. Coming from a world built to prioritize survival, intimacy with anything can feel like being followed by a sniper.

The further you go, the less you want to hide. Truth offered through the heart has this way of turning survival inside out. The heart says, "I see you and offer no conflict." In that light, survival very quickly reveals itself as a terribly inefficient approach to life. In the lightness of the heart, all of survival's sticky needs and tangled "yeah-buts" trip over each other in a comedy [...].

This is the essence of life. Lightness of being. Survival doesn't know where to look for lightness. Thinkytown couldn't hold onto it if it tried. But the heart knows its music.

In lightness of being there is space for everything. Nothing is excluded, not even the stickiest, crustiest need that drops on your head, dusty from sitting on the top shelf for a couple of decades where someone stuffed it—an emotional trauma experienced before there were tools to navigate it. Survival keeps lots of trinkets on the shelf, and each and every one of them has a fantastic story that, when told by the heart, somehow always ends up being funny.

Enjoy the stories. Love the details. The essence of life finds you in the moments when you take a break from surviving. Once you open to intimacy with what's true for you, the heart will guide you with unfailing love.

Kerri Lake is an author, educators and has been communicating with horses since she was a kid.

Three Levels Of Happiness

Anushka Fernandopulle

The Buddha talked about three different levels of happiness. The first is happiness that can come from pleasant sense experiences: delicious food, nice weather, pleasant music, or any kind of positive sensual experience. These are enjoyable but fleeting. Since all sense experiences change quickly and none can be relied upon to stay forever, this kind of happiness is fragile.

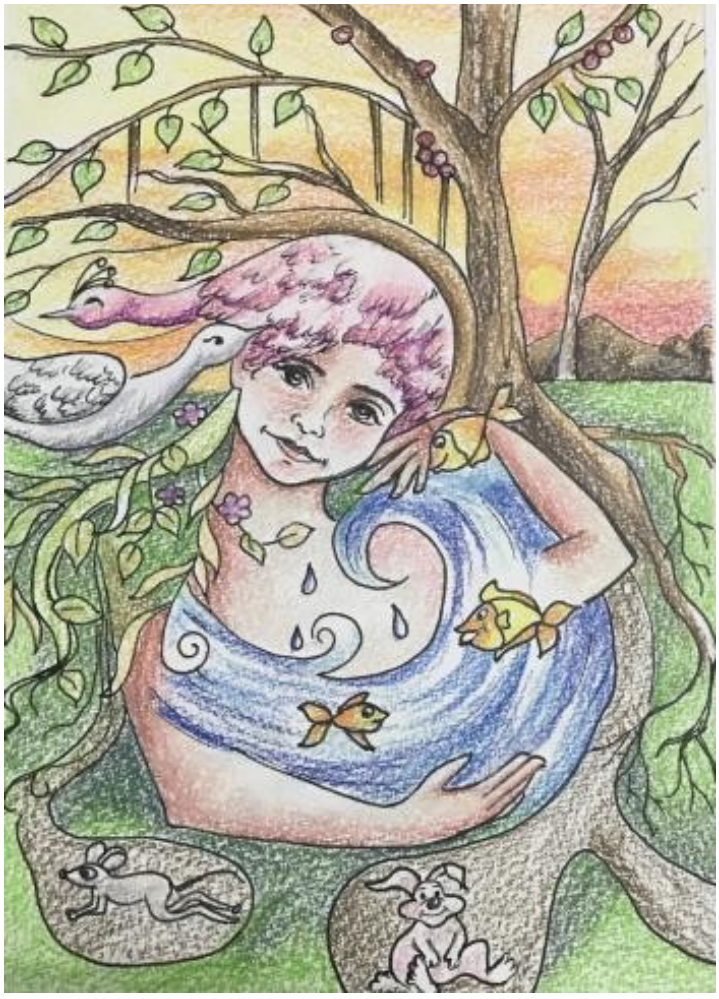
There is nothing wrong with pleasant experiences, but orienting one's life entirely around them comes with a deep restlessness, one that we may not even notice while we are caught up in that game. If we were solely chasing pleasant experiences for happiness, it could indeed seem like a selfish and limited life.

With just a little examination, most of us can see that happiness is in the mind and heart, not in the nose, eyes, ears, tongue, or body. So the next level is discovered by going directly to the mind, where in meditation we can uncover refined states that bring a deep sense of unity, well-being, and joy. The happiness from these states beats all sense experiences, even the most exquisite ones. It is more sublime, with an immense sense of ease and peace. When we attain these refined mental states, the things that block our sense of well-being (greed, hatred, fear, and other hindrances) temporarily lose their power, which is great. However, these obstacles are not yet totally eradicated; eventually, when conditions change, they will come back. So this kind of happiness, too, is ultimately fragile, requiring particular conditions to arise.

The highest level of happiness is a deep contentedness and peace beyond all changing circumstance. Through insight and wisdom, the obstacles to happiness can be uprooted from the mind rather than just temporarily suspended. This is the most reliable kind of happiness, well-being, and ease: unshakable and deeply rooted beyond all conditions, an awakening that brings peace even among the vicissitudes of life.

We can investigate each kind of happiness for ourselves; we can see what leads to a more reliable happiness. As we expand our access to deeper levels, we develop more bandwidth for caring about others and being of service in the world. We discover that happiness includes cultivating wholesome states like generosity, kindness, compassion, as well as letting go of fear, selfishness, hatred, and greed. As we grow out of orienting around "self-serving" drives, we can rest in a much greater perspective of spaciousness and caring. We can gradually expand our idea of "self" to encompass all, so seeking happiness eventually means being of service to all.

Excerpted from https://www.lionsroar.com/is-happiness-really-the-central-goal-of-buddhist-practice/



Opening To Greater Life

Thomas Berry

Tell the [future generations] that something new is happening, a new vision, a new energy, a new sacred story is coming into being in the transition from one era to another.
Tell them in the darkness of this time, a vast transformation is occurring in the depths of human consciousness, which is

leading to the recovery of the soul, the earth, the universe and a sense of the sacred …

Tell them that they must develop the inner vision that we need if we are to make the adjustments required for a viable future. Our existential questions must now be: How do we relate to the earth and to the universe? Our most basic issue is how we bond with the earth.

And tell them they will meet great companions along the way, including those that burrow in the soil, fly in the air and swim in the sea…

Tell them to seek their own role in the larger evolutionary process: tell them that humans are always in the process of becoming, always "opening to greater life," if they can learn to see it. Tell them the greatest need is to develop a sensitivity to recognize the inner promptings that emerge from the depths of one's own being where the sacred reality resides…

Above all, tell them to practice an intimate presence to the beauty and wonder of the natural world through their intuitive awareness that recognizes the oneness of all life; tell them to stop and enlarge moments throughout their days to become aware of the mysteries and miracles of creation all around them – the movement of a squirrel, the sound of a bird, the pattern of a leaf, changing patterns of light, the sun, the rain, the stars, dawn and sunset. Tell them we are not ourselves without everything and everyone else.

Tell them to remember the great seasons and cycles of life. In moments of intimacy with the natural world they will recover the lost sense of the sacred in the human-earth relationship. And they will be participating in the evolution of a new consciousness on earth that can overcome the mental fixations of our times expressed in radical division between humans and the natural world. A mutually enhancing relationship will then become possible as the communion of all things is understood.

Before his passing, when Thomas Berry was asked for words for future generations, above was his response. Quoted in Carolyn Toben's Recovering a Sense of the Sacred.

The Exquisite Risk

Mark Nepo

At any moment, if quiet enough and open enough, we can drop into the fabric of existence in which everything, even pain, has its vivid signature of energy that we call, at different times, truth or beauty or peace.

It's from this ground of being that we know and feel the unseeable web of connection between all life. It is from here that we see more clearly, below the tensions of our wants and disappointments.

The exquisite risk that St. John speaks of is twofold: the risk to still our own house so that Spirit can come through, so that we might drop into the vital nature of things, and the risk to then let that beautiful knowing inform our days.

The risk is exquisite because it holds open the veil before which is hell-on-earth and behind which is heaven-on-earth. For without knowing and feeling our connection to all life, the patterns of experience seem to make no sense. From within that knowing connection though, we can feel the tug and pull of everything alive. This does not eliminate pain, but distributes its acuteness, the way a net softens the impact of a fall. Without this feeling of connection, we bump through life blindly, startled by the suddenness of things. With it, we can place ourselves in a landscape teeming with meaning, just waiting to be lived into. The exquisite risk is a doorway, that lets us experience the extraordinary in the ordinary. It's always near. Truth opens it. Love opens it. Humility opens it. And if stubborn, pain will intensify to open it. Sadness can open it, if felt to its center. Silence and time can open it, if we enter them and don't just watch them.

In the same way that watching the surface of water can be mesmerizing and yet it does not reveal what waits below, the busyness and drama of the world can keep us from going below the surface of the very moments that are ours to enter. In my life, I have known truth and beauty and peace to be ever-present companions that I often sit beside, bemoaning their absence.

So often, the risk that leads to revelation and then courage is, at first, a very quiet threshold that we must dare to cross, through which life waits like a secret hidden in the open. The quiet risk somehow reminds us that there is *nothing between us*, nothing between the oceans and our

hearts, between the sands and our eyes, between the infinite sufferings and splendors that make up the breathing world of life on earth.

Mark Nepo is a poet, teacher, storyteller and author. Excerpt from his book, The Exquisite Risk.

~ ~

Agent Of Illumination

Elizabeth Gilbert

Some years ago, I was stuck on a crosstown bus in New York City during rush hour. Traffic was barely moving. The bus was filled with cold, tired people who were deeply irritated with one another, with the world itself. Two men barked at each other about a shove that might or might not

have been intentional. A pregnant woman got on, and nobody offered her a seat. Rage was in the air; no mercy would be found here.

But as the bus approached Seventh Avenue, the driver got on the intercom. 'Folks,' he said, 'I know you have had a rough day and you are frustrated. I can't do anything about the weather or traffic, but here is what I can do. As each one of you gets off the bus, I will reach out my hand to you. As you walk by, drop your troubles into the palm of my hand, okay? Don't take your problems home to your families tonight, just leave them with me. My route goes right by the Hudson River, and when I drive there later, I will open the window and throw your troubles in the water.'

It was as if a spell had lifted. Everyone burst out laughing. Faces gleamed with surprised delight. People who had been pretending for the past hour not to notice each other's existence were suddenly grinning at each other like, is this guy serious?

At the next stop, just as promised, the driver reached out his hand, palm up, and waited. One by one, all the exiting commuters placed their hand just above his and mimed the gesture of dropping something into his palm. Some people laughed as they did this, some teared up but everyone did it. The driver repeated the same lovely ritual at the next stop, too. And the next. All the way to the river.

We live in a hard world, my friends. Sometimes it is extra difficult to be a human being. Sometimes you have a bad day. Sometimes you have a bad day that lasts for several years. You struggle and fail. You lose jobs, money, friends, faith, and love. You witness horrible events unfolding in the news, and you become fearful and withdrawn. There are times when everything seems cloaked in darkness. You long for the light but don't know where to find it.

But what if you are the light? What if you are the very agent of illumination that a dark situation begs for?. That's what this bus driver taught me, that anyone can be the light, at any moment. This guy wasn't some big power player. He

wasn't a spiritual leader. He wasn't some media-savvy influencer. He was a bus driver, one of society's most invisible workers. But he possessed real power, and he used it beautifully for our benefit.

When life feels especially grim, or when I feel particularly powerless in the face of the world's troubles, I think of this man and ask myself, What can I do, right now, to be the light? Of course, I can't personally end all wars, or solve global warming, or transform vexing people into entirely different creatures. I definitely can't control traffic. But I do have some influence on everyone I brush up against, even if we never speak or learn each other's name.

No matter who you are, or where you are, or how mundane or tough your situation may seem, I believe you can illuminate your world. In fact, I believe this is the only way the world will ever be illuminated, one bright act of grace at a time, all the way to the river.

Elizabeth Gilbert is an American author best known for her memoir Eat, Pray, Love.

The Salt Doll

Ramakrishna Paramhansa

A salt doll journeyed for thousands of miles over land, until it finally came to the sea.

It was fascinated by this strange moving mass, quite unlike anything it had ever seen before.

"Who are you?" said the salt doll to the sea.

The sea smilingly replied, *"Come in and see."*

So the doll waded in.

The farther it walked into the sea the more it dissolved, until there was only very little of it left.

Before that last bit dissolved, the doll exclaimed in wonder, *"Now I know what I am!"*

Original parable by Ramakrishna Paramhansa, about a salt doll who wanted to measure the depth of the ocean. Edited above by Anthony De Mello.

Groundlessness

Meg Wheatley

Hope is what propels us into action. We've been taught to dream of a better world as the necessary first step in creating one. We create a clear vision for the future we want, then we set a strategy, make a plan, and get to work. We focus strategically on doing only those things that have a high probability of success. As long as we "keep hope alive" and work hard, our endeavors will create the world we want. How could we do our work if we had no hope that we'd succeed?

Motivated by hope, but then confronted by failure, we become depressed and demoralized. Life becomes meaningless; we despair of changing things for the better. At such a time, we learn the price of hope. Rather than inspiring and motivating us, hope has become a burden made heavy by its companion, fear of failing.

So we have to abandon hope, all of us, and learn how to find the place "beyond hope and fear." Liberated from hope and fear, we are free to discover clarity and energy, but the journey there demands behaviors we're not familiar with or have actively avoided. Here are a few markers of this journey, blessed wisdom gleaned from the experiences of those who have persevered and maintained steadfast focus even when their efforts have yielded little or no results.

Rudolf Bahro, a prominent German activist and iconoclast, describes the first step: "When the forms of an old culture are dying, the new culture is created by a few people who are not afraid to be insecure." Bahro offers insecurity as a positive trait, especially necessary in times of disintegration. Yet is it conceivable to think that feeling insecure would increase our ability to stay in the work of creating something new?

I don't know what Bahro meant by "insecure"; however, I've noted that those who endure, who have stamina for the long haul and become wiser in their actions over time, are those who are not attached to outcomes. They don't seek security in plans or accomplishments. They exchange certainty for curiosity, fear for generosity. They plunge into the problem, treat their attempts as experiments, and learn as they go. This kind of insecurity is energizing; people become engaged in figuring out what works instead of needing to be right or worrying about how to avoid failure. Whenever they discover something that does work, there's a huge rush of energy, often accompanied by laughter.

A willingness to feel insecure, then, is the first step on the journey beyond hope and fear. It leads to the far more challenging state: groundlessness. A knowing that nothing

ever remains the same, learning to live with the unrelenting constant of change, realizing that even the good things won't last forever, accepting that change is just the way it is.

Excerpted from https://www.margaretwheatley.com/articles/BeyondHopeandFear.pdf

~ ~

Two Types Of Heartbreaks

Parker Palmer

A disciple asks the rebbe: "Why does Torah tell us to 'place these words upon your hearts'? Why does it not tell us to place these holy words in our hearts?" The rebbe answers: "It is because as we are, our hearts are closed, and we cannot place the holy words in our hearts. So we place them on top of our hearts. And there they stay until, one day, the heart breaks and the words fall in."

—Hasidic tale

Heartbreak comes with the territory called being human. When love and trust fail us, when what once brought meaning goes dry, when a dream drifts out of reach, a devastating disease strikes, or someone precious to us dies, our hearts break and we suffer.

What can we do with our pain? How might we hold it and work with it? How do we turn the power of suffering toward new life? The way we answer those questions is critical because violence is what happens when we don't know what else to do with our suffering.

Violence is not limited to inflicting physical harm. We do violence every time we violate the sanctity of the human self — our own or another person's.

Sometimes we try to numb the pain of suffering in ways that dishonor our souls. We turn to noise and frenzy, nonstop work, or substance abuse as anesthetics that only deepen our suffering. Sometimes we visit violence upon others, as if causing them pain would mitigate our own. Racism, sexism, homophobia, and contempt for the poor are among the cruel outcomes of this demented strategy. Nations, too, answer suffering with violence. [...]

Yes, violence is what happens when we don't know what else to do with our suffering. But we can ride the power of suffering toward new life — it happens all the time.

We all know people who've suffered the loss of the most important person in their lives. At first, they disappear into grief, certain that life will never again be worth living. But, through some sort of spiritual alchemy, they eventually emerge to find that their hearts have grown larger and more compassionate. They have developed a greater capacity to take in others' sorrows and joys, not in spite of their loss but because of it.

Suffering breaks our hearts — but there are two quite different ways for the heart to break. There's the brittle heart that breaks apart into a thousand shards, a heart that takes us down as it explodes and is sometimes thrown like a grenade at the source of its pain. Then there's the supple heart, the

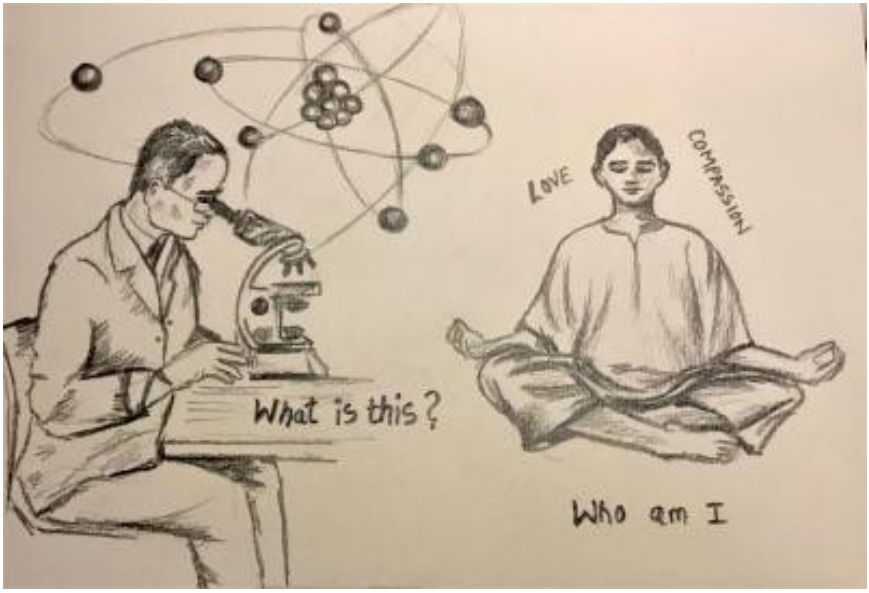
one that breaks open, not apart, growing into greater capacity for the many forms of love. Only the supple heart can hold suffering in a way that opens to new life.

What can I do to make my tight heart more supple, the way a runner stretches to avoid injury? That's a question I ask myself every day. With regular exercise, my heart is less likely to break apart into shards that may become shrapnel, and more likely to break open into largeness.

There are many ways to make the heart more supple, but all of them come down to this: Take it in, take it all in!

My heart is stretched every time I'm able to take in life's little deaths without an anesthetic: a friendship gone sour, a mean-spirited critique of my work, failure at a task that was important to me. I can also exercise my heart by taking in life's little joys: a small kindness from a stranger, the sound of a distant train reviving childhood memories, the infectious giggle of a two-year-old as I "hide" and then "leap out" from behind cupped hands. Taking all of it in — the good and the bad alike — is a form of exercise that slowly transforms my clenched fist of a heart into an open hand.

Excerpted from https://onbeing.org/blog/heartbreak-violence-and-hope-for-new-life/



When Science Is The Arbiter Of Metaphysics

Paul Kalanithi

Although I had been raised in a devout Christian family, where prayer and Scripture readings were a nightly ritual, I, like most scientific types, came to believe in the possibility of a material conception of reality, an ultimately scientific worldview that would grant a complete metaphysics, minus outmoded concepts like souls, God, and bearded white men in robes. I spent a good chunk of my twenties trying to build a frame for such an endeavor. The problem, however, eventually became evident: to make science the arbiter of metaphysics is to banish not only God from the world but also love, hate, meaning—to consider a world that is self-evidently not the world we live in. That's not to say that if you believe in meaning, you must also

believe in God. It is to say, though, that if you believe that science provides no basis for God, then you are almost obligated to conclude that science provides no basis for meaning and, therefore, life itself doesn't have any. In other words, existential claims have no weight; all knowledge is scientific knowledge.

Yet the paradox is that scientific methodology is the product of human hands and thus cannot reach some permanent truth. We build scientific theories to organize and manipulate the world, to reduce phenomena into manageable units. Science is based on reproducibility and manufactured objectivity. As strong as that makes its ability to generate claims about matter and energy, it also makes scientific knowledge inapplicable to the existential, visceral nature of human life, which is unique and subjective and unpredictable. Science may provide the most useful way to organize empirical, reproducible data, but its power to do so is predicated on its inability to grasp the most central aspects of human life: hope, fear, love, hate, beauty, envy, honor, weakness, striving, suffering, virtue.

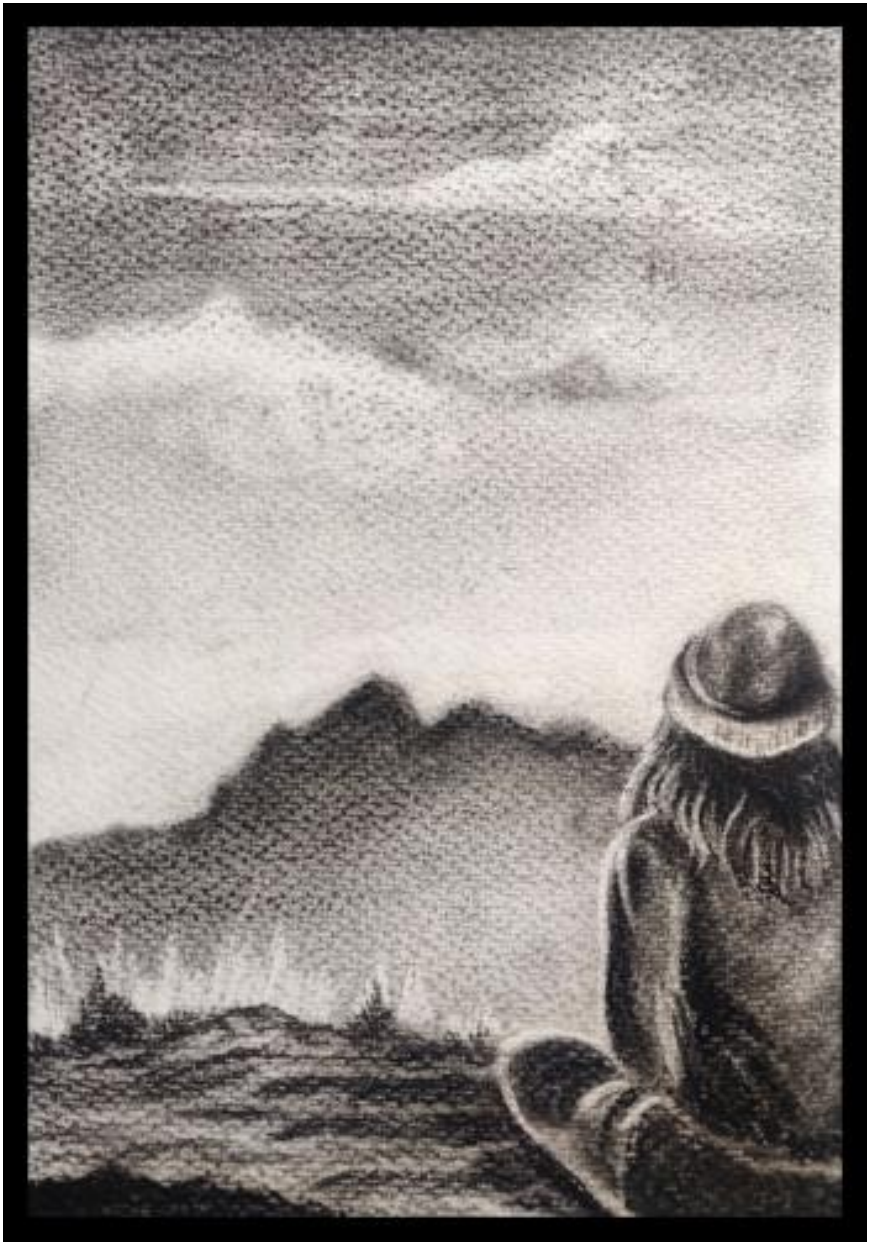
Between these core passions and scientific theory, there will always be a gap. No system of thought can contain the fullness of human experience. The realm of metaphysics remains the province of revelation. [...]

In the end, it cannot be doubted that each of us can see only a part of the picture. The doctor sees one, the patient another, the engineer a third, the economist a fourth, the pearl diver a fifth, the alcoholic a sixth, the cable guy a seventh, the sheep farmer an eighth, the Indian beggar a ninth, the pastor a tenth. Human knowledge is never contained in one person. It grows from the relationships we create between each other and the world, and still it is never complete. And Truth comes somewhere above all of them, where, as at the end of that Sunday's reading:

The sower and reaper can rejoice together. For here the saying is verified that "One sows and another reaps." I

sent you to reap what you have not worked for; others have done the work, and you are sharing the fruits of their work.

Paul Kalanithi wrote essays for The New York Times and Stanford Medicine reflecting on being a physician and a patient, the human experience of facing death, and the joy he found despite terminal illness. He passed away at the age of 37, in 2015. Excerpt above from his best-selling book,
When Breath Becomes Air.



You Can't Get There From Here

Pema Chodron

When you sit down to meditate, you can bring to your practice the notion of the threefold purity: not being caught up with ideas about yourself, not being caught up with ideas about the practice, and not being caught up with ideas about the result. [...]

To begin with, just give up any expectations of yourself. That's a simple good instruction for how to meditate. Liberate yourself from any sort of idea of how you're supposed to be, and just sit. Then remember this instruction occasionally during the meditation period, because you're going to do a lot of talking to yourself about how right or how wrong you are. You're going to spend a lot of time on center stage as the star of your own movie. You can spend a lot of time planning, worrying, and trying to get it all right.

Instead of holding on to a limited identity of yourself, do your best to observe yourself minute after minute. Observe what's happening. You'll keep freezing it by fixating on it, because you do have an idea of who you are; we all have an idea of who we are. But if you'll just observe instead of fixating, the meditation itself will begin to shake that identity up a lot. You'll begin to have doubt about being just one way; you'll see that who you are and how you are keep changing. The first five minutes of the meditation period you're depressed; the gong rings and you feel happy. In walking meditation you're bored; you sit down on your cushion again and your back hurts. The gong rings and you realize you've been on a shopping spree in New York City. The changes go on and on. Observe them with no expectation

of how you're supposed to be, or who you are. Just sit there and see what happens. [...]

The second guideline of the threefold purity is "No meditation." Don't make your meditation a project or a special event; don't bring into it an attitude of great seriousness and solemnity. For that matter, have no concept of your meditation at all, no religiosity. Don't hold any notions about it, not even, "Oh, meditation is meant to be completely natural; you just sit down, relax the mind, and be cool."

We have a lot of ideas about what's good meditation, what's bad meditation. The notion here is that we sit down with no expectations of ourselves and no expectations of what the practice is. We simply follow the instructions, without imagining that meditation is supposed to be this way or that way. We can continuously let go of any solid views on the meditator or the meditation, any caught-upness. That's the whole training—to let go and observe without judgment, without bias. We can just let go. [...]

The third quality of threefold purity is "No result." Give up all hope of fruition. Practice without hope of anything beyond right now. That's all there is; there's no later. Being on the spot is the only way any transformation of your being occurs. If you practice with hope and fear, if you practice in order to become what you think you should be—even a calmer, more loving, more compassionate person—you're just setting yourself up for disappointment. You can't get there from here. Being fully here for each moment—that's the point, from now until you die.

Pema Chodron is a popular American-born teacher of Buddhism. She serves as resident teacher at Gampo Abbey Monastery in Nova Scotia. For more, visit pemachodronfoundation.org. Above is excerpted from https://www.lionsroar.com/the-threefold-purity/

Say Wow

Chelan Harkin

Each day before our surroundings
become flat with familiarity
and the shapes of our lives click into place,
dimensionless and average as Tetris cubes,

before hunger knocks from our bellies
like a cantankerous old man
and the duties of the day stack up like dishes
and the architecture of our basic needs
commissions all thought
to construct the 4-door sedan of safety,

before gravity clings to our skin
like a cumbersome parasite
and the colored dust of dreams
sweeps itself obscure in the vacuum of reason,

each morning before we wrestle the world
and our hearts into the shape of our brains,
look around and say, “Wow!”
Feed yourself fire.
Scoop up the day entire
like a planet-sized bouquet of marvel
sent by the Universe directly into your arms
and say, “Wow!”

Break yourself down
into the basic components of primitive awe
and let the crescendo of each moment
carbonate every capillary
and say, “Wow!”

Yes, before our poems become calloused
with revision
let them shriek off the page of spontaneity

and before our metaphors get too regular,
let the sun stay
a conflagration of homing pigeons
that fights through fire
each day to find us.

Chelan_Harkin is a mystic poet. :)